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VOLUME 12 NUMBER 2

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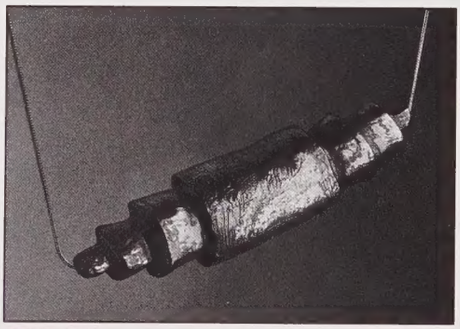

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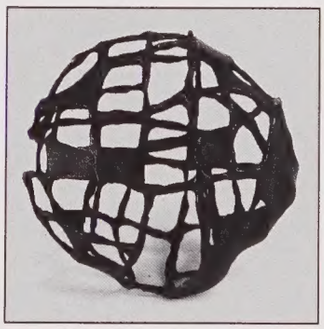

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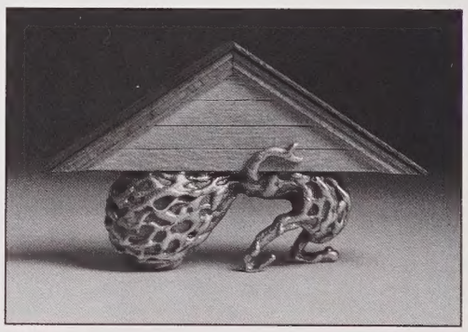

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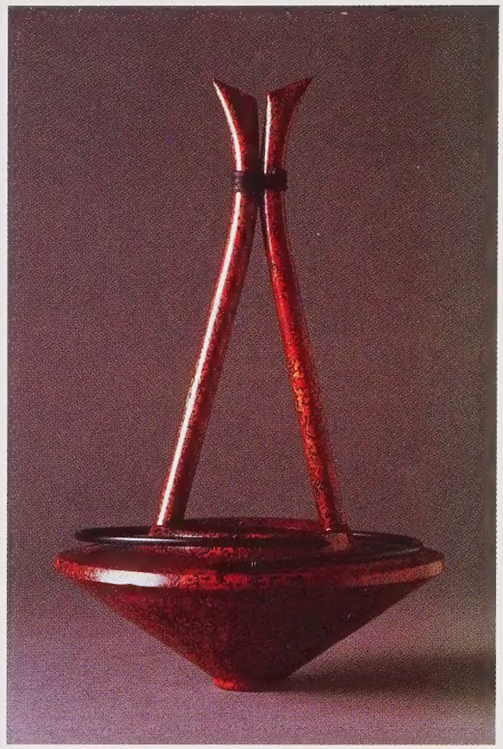

Departments

Editorial 4

Letters 6

Art & Technics 8
by Tim McCreight

Recent Sightings 10
by Bruce Metcalf

Books 47

Features

Cu_3: 1991 National Metal Competition 12
by Robert L. Cardinale

Beneath Surface and Form: Lynne E. Hull 18
by William Baran-Mickle

Profit by Design: A Profile of The Niessing Company 22
by Donald Friedlich and Judith Mitchell

Kum-Boo: 24K Overlay on Silver 28
by Komelia Okim

Henry Steig: Jazz Man, Writer, Jeweler 34
by Catherine Siracusa and Sidney Levitt

Reviews

Judith Kaufman 48
by Charlene M. Modena

John Nihart 49
by William Baran-Mickle

Metalwork '91: 50
Washington Guild of Goldsmiths Sixth Juried Exhibition
by Dalene Barry

Elisabeth Holder 51
by Lee Fleming

Above
Lynne E. Hull, *Basket #17*
copper, aluminum, auto lacquer, patina
17 x 11", 1990. See page 18

Cover
Stephen Walker, *Married Metal Bowl #33*
brass, copper, nickel, bronze, sterling, 6 x 7 x 9"
Photo: Tim Finn. See page 12

Editorial

The Society of North American Goldsmiths is committed to documenting and encouraging scholarly research regarding metalsmithing in North America and abroad. Information and opinion on current philosophical and aesthetic concerns, the marketplace, education and technique are principal concerns. Through clear and insightful documentation, the efforts of contemporary metalsmiths are linked to great accomplishments within the broader history of jewelry and metalsmithing. Research and documentation encourage curatorial study and further connoisseurship and collecting. The practicing metalsmith, whether an advocate of tradition or of change, is provided a clearer understanding of the creative efforts of the field, as well as the broader relationship of jewelry and metalsmithing to art and design. This understanding fosters an appreciation for a collective value.

In November of 1968 nine metalsmiths gathered in Chicago and formed a guild of North American jewelers and metalsmiths. Three months later the membership, now totaling 18, met to establish the name of the organization, plan a conference and exhibition, and formulate long-range goals. By 1970 membership in the Society of North American Goldsmiths had more than tripled to 64, and five years later 304 members received the first issue of the organization's newsletter. In April 1977 the society began publishing a magazine, *Goldsmiths Journal*, which greatly improved communication efforts. The journal presented member activities, technical information, reviews of exhibitions and books, and opportunities and events of interest to the membership.

The early 1980s were a time of change for the organization and for its publications. *Goldsmiths Journal* became the quarterly *Metalsmith* and was published in conjunction with a bimonthly newsletter. The Society of North American Goldsmiths received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to implement major changes in the magazine. The first issue of *Metalsmith* featured not only a new name but an improved layout with larger photographic images, articles of a historical nature, the first "Metalsmiths Guide" (London), contemporary metalsmithing concerns, exhibition reviews and a reader's survey. Articles by professional writers in the field, as well as in the related fields of art history, philosophy, aesthetics and archeology, were solicited. NEA grants in 1982, 1983 and 1984 enabled the organization to address circulation, advertising, and distribution issues related to the magazine, provided payments to contributing authors, and improved the overall visual quality of the magazine.

The Fall 1984 issue of *Metalsmith* featured the first full-color cover. The introduction of color added an exciting dimension to the magazine, providing greater opportunities for advertising. Advertising revenues began to play an important role in the production of the magazine, lowering the price per issue while continuing to meet the demanding standards of the readership. Over the next several years, *Metalsmith* continued to reach yet greater levels of sophistication as the magazine experienced visual changes, further intellectual dialogue and debate, additional interior color, and increased printing runs. At this printing, *Metalsmith* has a primary readership of more than 6,500 and a secondary readership of more than 20,000 and reaches readers in 35 countries.

With this issue, the Society of North American Goldsmiths, on behalf of *Metalsmith*, seeks a new editor. Sarah Bodine has served *Metalsmith*, first as managing editor and then as editor, for the past twelve years, providing a strong foundation on which to build. The Board of Directors of the Society acknowledges her commitment and vision and wishes her every success in her future endeavors. Virginia Croft has assumed the responsibility of interim editor and will continue to serve in this capacity until a new editor is identified.

During the search for a new editor, we feel that it is crucial to remain aware of our membership and maintain a representation that reflects the quality, energy and diversity within our field. A publication is defined by those who make it a reality. *Metalsmith* is no exception. The editor, contributing editors, writers, graphic designers, production manager and coordinator, advertising and circulation representative, and printer will continue to come together as a collective force in continuing the high standards to which you've become accustomed and which you have supported.

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Metalsmith

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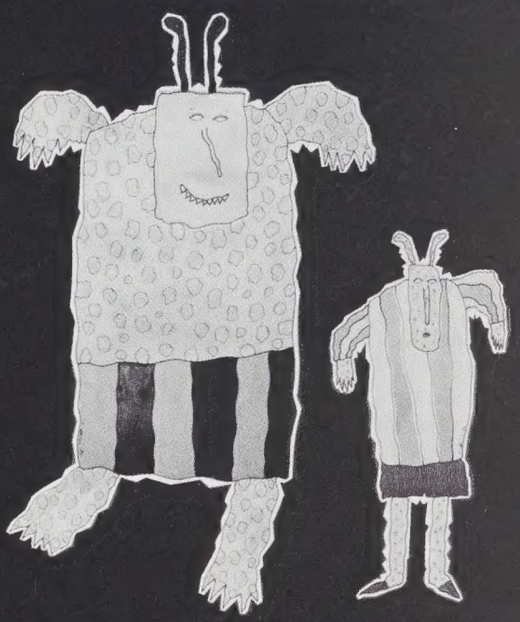

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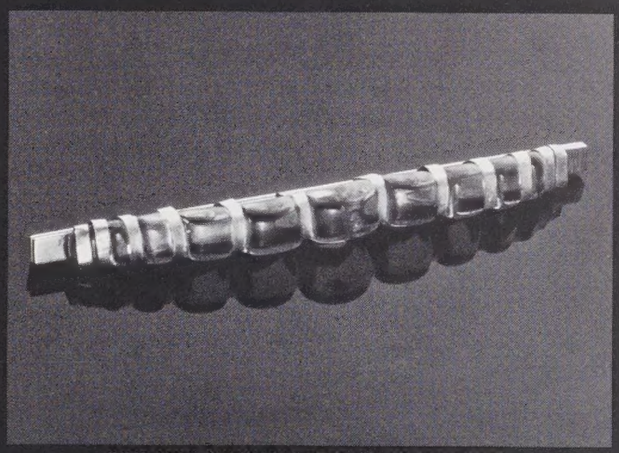

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Letters

Dear Editor:

In his review of Jan Loyd's work (*Metalsmith*, Fall 91), David Butler failed to be hit over the head with the shovel. I will take point with his query, "Can one really use a shovel on an abstract idea like cultural nostalgia?" To begin with, I don't think cultural nostalgia has had the opportunity of remaining abstract in the land of the hard sell and in the era of Reagan-Bush polemics. Products ranging from Log Cabin syrup to Ford Mustang use nostalgia to endorse themselves with palatable cultural myths of America. This nationalistic fervor extends itself into the political arena, and we have Mr. Death Valley Days in the Oval Office and a Texas oilman riding herd on the Middle East. Easy caricaturizations aside, George Bush plays to the fears of eroding WASP cultural dominance with his portrayal of New England affluence. The fear of cultural otherness is used by the political right in its own devices for measuring obscenity – the endangered family (traditional, chaste, intact) is pitted against the NEA (subversive). The shovel is a likely foil to this current slant of American politics: "Devices for Measuring Obscenity" is a euphemism for shoveling shit – the kind of shit being thrown in the public's face by politicians on a witch hunt (who stage a battle over values to mask an essentially anti-intellectual attack on the art community). Cultural nostalgia is objectified as a product and tangible as a lifestyle for consumption.

Similarly, Loyd presents the shovel as an object of nostalgia. Its wooden form reflects our preindustrial past, symbolizing the yearnings of a bureaucratic work force for a personalized, agrarian labor. In the vocabulary of allegory, the shovel is industry, American know-how. Loyd's use of handicraft, an allover surface treatment of pyrography, further embellishes the shovel with the act of labor. Her imagery is the romantic (laurel boughs, trailing vines) commingled with dollar signs and didactic phrasing. Nineteenth-century allegory is woven with blatant signs of commerce to simultaneously allay and expose our fears of government, a ruling class out of control. The multiple associations of this imagery, the hobbyist's technique, and the shovel speak to the complexity of how cultural and political values are assimilated. Users of classical architecture and the ditch digger's tool share similar assumptions about a mythic America, the right to wealth, and the value of handwork – ideologies that pervade class lines.

While observing a political "message" (on which he cannot elaborate), Butler does not acknowledge the critical intent of this work. His obtuseness ("Despite the fact that I don't really understand these works, I like them...") is an insult to Jan Loyd's work and to the readership of this magazine. As well, such comments have a more serious effect. That is, the political and critical content of this work is dismissed, it is depoliticized. Butler also disarms the work by describing it as "mysterious" and "enigmatic." These terms are incorrect; rather, the work is complex. It incorporates allegorical imagery, rich surface detailing, didactic terms, and the combination of craft and object to produce loaded meaning. This work's complexity requires informed analysis and a willingness to look beyond nostalgic terms of the spiritual when reviewing art.

Mary Douglas, Maspeth, NY

David Butler responds:

There are many kinds of shovels in this world. Among them are snow shovels, garden shovels, shit shovels, ditch shovels, grain shovels, and Jan Brooks Loyd's amazing, challenging, yet ultimately unresolved art shovels. Ms. Douglas's interpretation of the shovels may be what the artist intended, but the violent sarcasm which she suggests is simply not present in the beautiful shovels presented at Ariel Gallery. The meticulous, careful burning of the images into wood; the balancing of the shovels, one against the other; the presentation of the shovels on nice, clean pedestals in a serene gallery setting suggest a calm, quiet order despite the "dollar signs and didactic phrasing."

In her pedantic explanation of Loyd's work, Douglas seems more interested in advancing her own ideas about the state of American culture, including politics, than actually *looking* at the sculptures. "Log Cabin syrup"? "Mr. Death Valley Days"? "ruling class out of control"? These things aren't there. *Look* at the sculpture. The artist's intent is irrelevant. Motivation is irrelevant. If it is not in the work, then there is a failure in communication, and the work is unresolved.

Though I don't understand all of Douglas's letter (do the shovels reflect "preindustrial past" or "industry, American know-how"?), I like it. Not only am I a fan of honest opinion and spirited debate, it gives me the opportunity to comment further on Loyd's art shovels. I do like them. Their beauty and uniqueness make them very alluring. However, perhaps they are too beautiful for their own good. By using the shovels as her canvas, she has created these amazing objects which deny their shovel heritage. There is no way one can visualize steaming heaps of excrement, verbal or otherwise, on these luscious surfaces; and a ditch digger would soon be holding a handful of wood chips and splinters in any kind of vigorous digging activity with these tools. Loyd has moved these shovels into another realm beyond allegory. Dare I use the *E* word here?

Of course, all this is just my opinion. One individual's honest opinion. Some may even think it is a screwy opinion, but no one should be insulted, and if they are, I have two words for them: Lighten up.

David Butler, Atlanta, GA

Dear Editor:

Thank you to Jeff Wise for outlining in the Letters section of *Metalsmith* (Winter 92) one of my own frustrations with the current state of division between the craft community/struggling to *be* art and the craft community/already *is* art. There seems to be a vocal contingent of designers, gallery owners, collectors, promoters and critics who are so lost in contemplation and exploitation of the fringe of our field (trying to *be* art) that they end up missing the mark, because without a well-defined base (already *being* art) there can be no fringe.

I know it's much more for many people – mirror to the soul and all that – but for the sake of the current argument, art, as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is "skill; its display or application" or "skill in doing anything as the result of knowledge and practice" or, further (and here begins the rub, because nothing can exist in a void), "the application of skill to objects of taste ... esp. in modern use; skill displaying itself in perfection of workmanship, perfection of execution as an *object in itself*" (emphasis mine). Whether one agrees with that last bit or not, it doesn't imply that the art within a field is entirely at the fringe, but is from the entire body of the field so long as there is a certain perfection of execution and concept, both "knowledge and practice."

Jewelry has been worn by every known past and present social group, usually somehow reflecting both their relationship with the environment and their value system. Perhaps because it is worn on the body (historically, at least), it is an incredibly powerful concept, laden with some very complex emotional baggage. For me, creating an object that is never removed by a client, which is so treasured as to become part of the client's self-image, is the meristem of a long and sometimes difficult process. Communication is one of the most difficult challenges and perhaps one of the most fundamental components of successful art, even if that communication is an internal dialog that only the artist participates in. Because of this, many of my works are quite functional (I try to expand my communication beyond just myself). I've also done some pretty wild stuff. When the mood strikes, I can get as "out there" as the best of them, making objects that probably won't often be worn and really won't have much meaning to anyone but me. Hopefully, though, they still demonstrate "knowledge and practice."

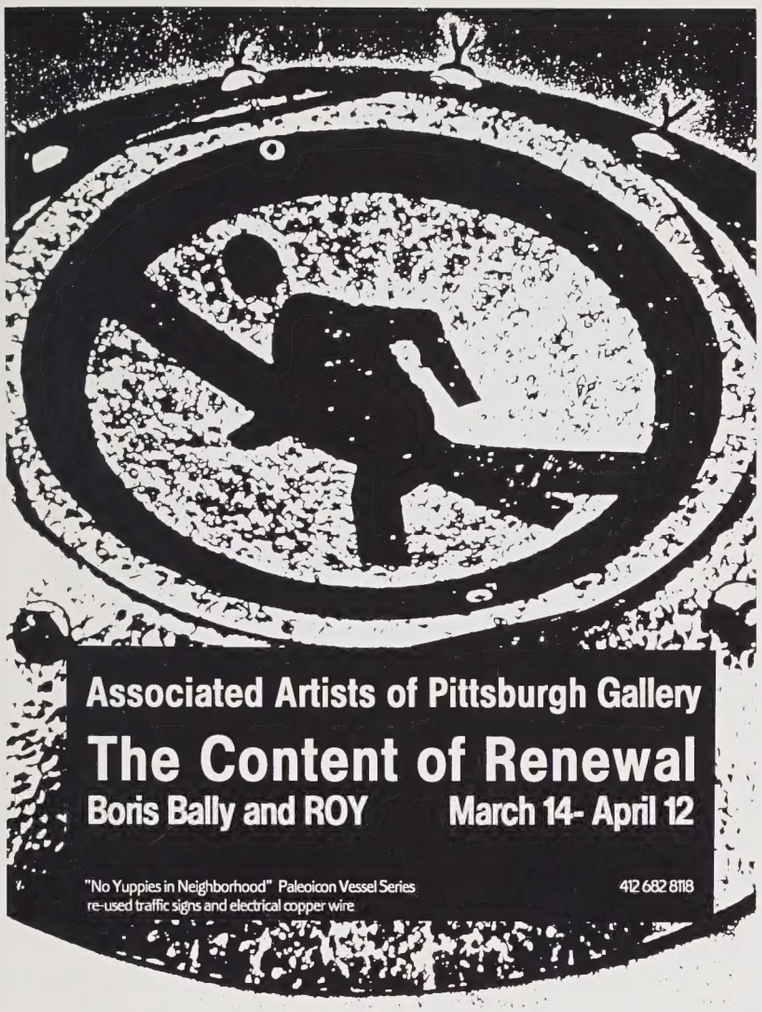
Yet it is one of my most treasured moments when a client's eyes glow warm and connected and they say "It's so simple" as they put a piece on because they *get* it. They get the point! I also prefer to work primarily in precious metals and gemstones and, as Mr. Wise says, "I don't appreciate [works] being dismissed without consideration because they're made with gold and gems."

I would like to see a craft promotion on the national level where excellence is the only criterion, where those of us with a maturity and self-confidence that go beyond the need to "flip the aesthetic bird" can meet and work with the public, where those in the he*art* of the field can do their thing along with those on the fringe. Or, even better, we all could do some fringe stuff when we felt like it but not *have* to do just fringe stuff to get some recognition.

I stress to my students integrity of design as well as integrity of workmanship, and I think that the public is done a great disservice by not being exposed to more integrity in the marketplace. It is easy to say that the public generally doesn't deserve that much integrity, but I feel that's a cop-out. For those of us who see communication as a large part of what we do (no matter what we're doing), it is more than a cop-out, it's another elitist tyranny.

Gary Dawson, Goldworks, Eugene, OR

Letters continued on page 46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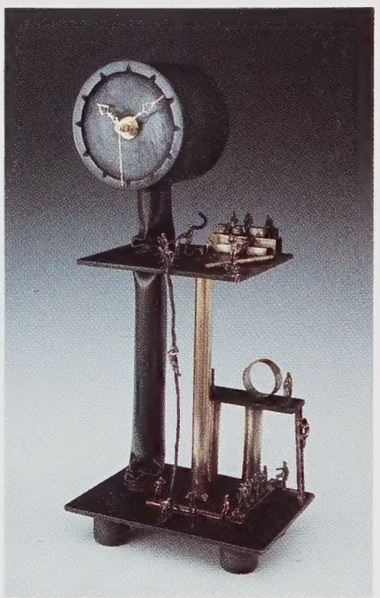

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by Tim McCreight

Looking at the Wrong Object

Somewhere in our childhood each of us heard tales of visitors to faraway places who encountered superstitious natives and their quaint fears about photography. An elder sometimes would not allow his picture to be taken because he was afraid that a piece of his soul would be taken as well. Of course we knew better, having been photographed at every Family Gathering since we were born. The story was always presented with the kindly forbearance of a sophisticated culture toward a charmingly naive one.

I'm having second thoughts.

Before I go further I should say that I'm about to raise a complaint without offering a constructive alternative. I hate when people do that, but though I don't have an alternative to suggest, I feel strongly about the issues that arise as we photograph handmade objects.

It is obvious that photography is here to stay in business, education and communication. In the crafts world, photos are used to gain acceptance to shows and galleries, as professional credentials when seeking jobs and grants, as indications of style, and in books and periodicals. Take all that away and the world would be a drab place, as well as one in which it would be a lot harder to do business.

It's a fact, though, that when we photograph an object, we create a new object: the slide or print. It can be large or small, of good or poor quality and so on, but whatever it is affects our perception of the original object. Ask anyone who depends on acceptance to shows about the importance of top-notch slides. I've even heard it said that great slides of mediocre work will triumph over poor slides of exceptional work. In a case like that, the judges are looking at the wrong object.

Slides and handmade objects are more than just a little different; they represent opposing and contradictory worlds. As objects, slides are everything we try to avoid in our work. They are machine made, identical, insistently uniform, and plain. Obviously I'm talking here about the physical slide, the cardboard and acetate object. They require no skill – you simply drop off your film at a store and return in a few days to pick it up. No matter how clever, experienced or painstaking you are, the objects will always look alike.

Slides, of course, are easy to duplicate and therefore have a disposable quality. They have achieved the status of photocopies: try this or that, then throw away the inferior versions. This is neither right nor wrong, but is a mind-set opposite to the one we take to the bench.

A photograph fixes an object in a composition, establishing its orientation, setting and scale. It is hard to overestimate the numbing effect this imposes on the viewer. Picture what happens if I hand you a banana. You take it in your hand and inevitably reorient it in space. You'd think me silly if I scolded you and said you weren't pointing it in the right direction. After all, your choice of direction is as valid as mine. I would prefer that the objects I make be seen only in that context of participation. I am offended by the tyranny of the photograph. And, of course, it goes without saying that photographs reduce the five senses to a single one, forcing us to focus on the form and color at the expense of weight, smell, touch and sound.

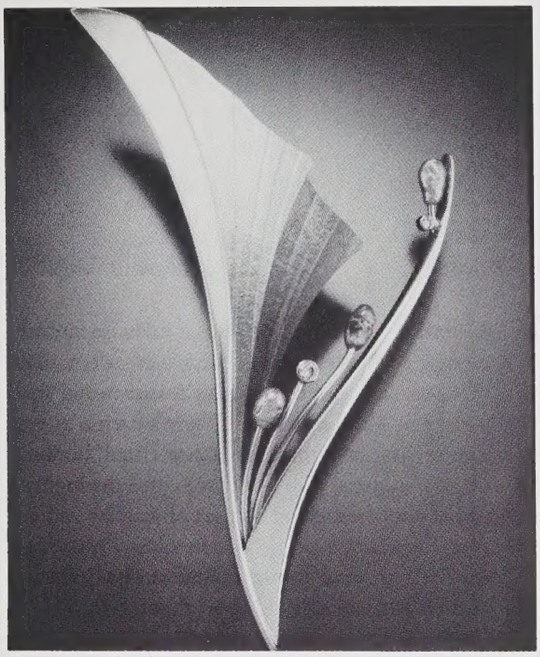
In a related way, photographs are a fixed moment in time. This means that if the passage of time is relevant to a work, the piece must be rephotographed many times, say, as the patina darkens. More intimately, the moment of orientation and light, the relationship of the piece to its environment is locked. In a photograph we can't rotate the piece and hold it up to the light, watching it change as we move it through space. Yet isn't this exactly what we do when handed a piece of jewelry?

I dislike handling slides of my work. I put off organizing or selecting slides until I absolutely must, and for years I thought this had to do with the mechanics of organization. Now I'm wondering if this dread doesn't have something to do with the soul-less quality of the object. Slides to me are like drab memories of a pleasant experience in my past. The photograph, far from capturing the essence, dissipates and trivializes it.

It's not uncommon for me now to think about photography while I'm in the early stages of a piece. Sometimes it is clear to me, for reasons more felt than reasoned, that the piece being made should not be photographed. I've become aware that the process of making is dramatically altered by this decision. Ironically, I find that I pay more attention to details, knowing that the piece has an immediate reality and will exist in the full and living space of an interactive viewer.

I was soundly scolded by a colleague when I discussed this recently. And perhaps he's right. In one way it would be a setback if each of us were exposed only to work that we could experience physically. On the other hand, that experience would be so different from the act of looking at work in photographic images that the trade-off might be worth it.

Tim McCreight is head of the metals department at Portland School of Art and a contributing editor to Metalsmith.



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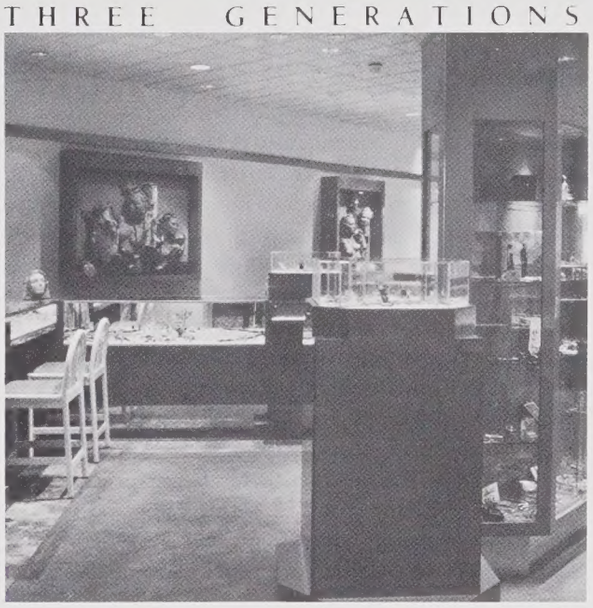

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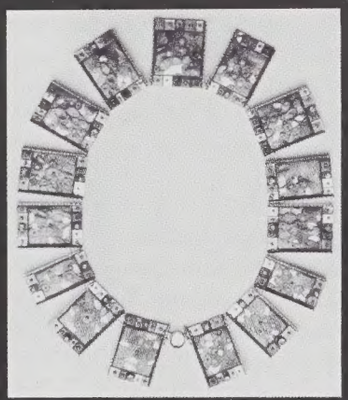
JEWELRY INVITATIONAL

May 15, 1992-July 31, 1992

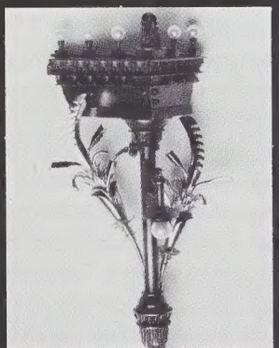
Robin Kranitzky
Kim Overstreet
Kent Raible
James Barker
Jeff Wise
Judith Kaufman
Linda Watson Abbott
Kris Patzloff
Heinz Brummel
Kay Whitcomb
Robert Ebendorf
Colette
D.X. Ross
Tod Pardon
Earl Pardon
Thomas Mann
Lisa Fidler
Barbara Walter
Pier Voulkos
Joyce J. Scott
Laura Poponoe
Lucia Antonelli
Mardi Jo Cohen
J. Fred Woell
Catherine Butler
William Harper
Margaret Francis
Richard Mawdsley
Christina Smith
Margaret Barnaby
Tina Johnson DePuy
Marianne Hunter
Kiff Slemmons



Earl Pardon, Necklace 1991
Silver, Gold, Enamel,
Semi Precious Stones

Richard Mawdsley's New Work Architectural Series

April 15, 1992-May 30, 1992



Richard Mawdsley, Corsage, 1991
Silver, Gold Plate
Size 3¾" × 2¼"
Photo by
David Caras

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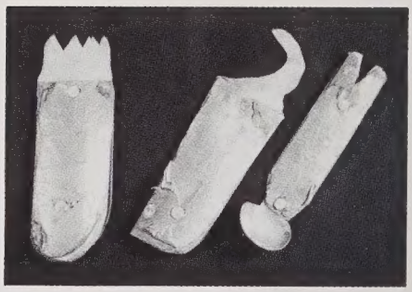
Recent Sightings

Neo-primitive



Holly Churchill
Knife, Fork, and Spoon
silver, wood, gold-plated

by Bruce Metcalf

There's an underground movement afoot in the metalsmithing schools. It's not organized, it has no manifesto. Instead, the movement seems to be deeply felt but unarticulated responses of hundreds of students to the conditions of their culture. It takes the form of a spontaneous revival of primitivism. By "primitivism," we generally mean that artists are looking toward non-literate cultures (that were once called primitive or savage) for inspiration and guidance, usually motivated by a sense that these foreign cultures offer something that one's own social structure does not. Of course, Western artists have been fascinated by the notion of a "primitive," uncontaminated, uncivilized culture since Rousseau invented the "noble savage." Of twentieth-century painters, the Fauves, the Cubists and the Surrealists all looked to African and Oceanic artifacts for inspiration and proof of the legitimacy of their efforts. However, the appearance of a primitivist tendency in the jewelry field is new.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of a primitivist impulse is in the sudden explosion of piercing for jewelry and of tattooing in the middle class. Formerly confined to the margins of society, these two practices are now an emblem of rebellion for every mall brat in the country. One could dismiss the phenomenon as another passing fad, except that these are permanent: the hole in the nostril and the tattoo on the shoulder can't be taken off like an unfashionable shirt. Such emblems are clearly intended to be more than skin deep; they are supposed to be carried for life. It's no accident that piercing and tattooing are both practices identified with non-Western and non-literate cultures all over the world.

In these cases, the reference to primitivism is (in the words of William Rubin), "a counter-cultural battering ram." The tattoo and the hole in the body are intended to be combative emblems of difference and dissatisfaction. Raised on television, socialized in shopping malls, the brightest of the generation now approaching maturity sense a vacuum, especially of moral and spiritual values. Young people are looking away from high technology, away from the ministrations of consumer culture, to something they imagine to be more honest, more emotionally direct and more spiritual. So, given the history of a century of malcontents, it's logical that the new generation of dropouts should look to that dark alter ego of Euro-American civilization: the "primitive." Neo-primitivism takes several forms in jewelry and metalsmithing. Most numerous are objects that look like they might be used for a ritual in a preindustrial society. They might be rattles, fetishes, indecipherable insignia or big jewelry that look vaguely like something out of *National Geographic*. From my experience, however, very few of these objects are actually used in a performance or ritual. The other sign of a primitivist tendency is roughly hewed forms, crusty finishes and generally low levels of craftsmanship. Here, the roughness stands for a complex analogy in which unpolished craft equals the ostensible emotional directness of a primitive culture, and controlled craft equals the imprisoned, sick psyche of civilized society.

The problem with these two artistic strategies is that both rely on flawed assumptions about the nature of pre-literate societies as well as some unexamined notions about what we, as citizens of a very highly industrialized culture, can do to recover the "primitive" for ourselves. A cursory study of any pre-literate society will quickly reveal that the idea of an uncivilized society in which all individuals can freely express themselves is pure fantasy. In fact, social life in most of the cultures that we imagine to be "primitive" is highly circumscribed by taboos, rigorous standards of behavior, and a network of obligations within a kinship system. So the idea that we, in our malls and living rooms, have less ability to express ourselves is utter baloney. The analogy of roughness standing for unfettered, primitive emotion is a juvenile fantasy. Similarly, the notion of making a simulated ritual object is equally fantastic. An imaginary ritual proposes no useful solutions to our moral and spiritual crisis; it only proposes an escapist reverie. There's even a question as to whether one person can actually make up a new ritual, because authentic rituals are collaborative cultural projects that evolve through a number of generations, and cannot be created like art objects by individuals.

As Marianna Torgovnick points out in *Gone Primitive*, such flawed assumptions about the primitive do not represent our understanding of tribal cultures as much our projections upon them. Aided by a Hollywood stereotype of the other as an exotic, exciting plaything to which we have full access, we create the "primitive" to act as alter ego to the corrupted modern self. Spiritually starved? Create a shaman, a medicine woman, or a totem. Feeling repressed? Imagine a culture where nobody ever tells you what to do. Think that technology has failed? Make up a country with no technology at all, and imagine it to be an ecological paradise. Because we feel rotten, we create an unspoiled Eden out of thin air. The fact that real pre-literate cultures do not resemble such fantasies does not seem to bother most Americans. In the search for authenticity, we construct a totally unauthentic model to emulate.

This is not to say that all primitivist enterprises are stupid and false. Jim Ward, who spoke to the SNAG conference in San Francisco, has participated in a re-enactment of the Lakota Sioux sun dance, which entails being tethered from a chest piercing and eventually breaking through the pierced skin. Of course, such a ceremony cannot be authentic in the sense of being a desperate Native American protest against the incursions of Europeans, but it can be authentic as a search employing pain and endurance to achieve a genuine transcendent experience. Similarly, groups all over the country are reviving and inventing rituals which are legitimate attempts to re-engage the spiritual aspect of life. While we cannot know if the ceremonies actually work, it is possible to respect the seriousness of the effort and the research that serves as a background.

Every generation, it seems, forms a minority that rejects the illusions of modern life and embarks on a search for a more genuine experience. The Dadaists in Zurich, the Situationists in Paris, the Beats in New York and the Punks in London all spurned modern Eurocentric civilization and proposed stripping away the trappings of progress for something unmediated and authentic. At worst, artists and writers in these movements projected their needs onto a helpless population who (conveniently) could not speak for themselves, and made these people into a paragon of uncivilized virtue. At best, the same artists could become students. Study would reveal that, although modern men and women might have much to learn, there are no Paradises on earth.

Selected Readings

Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, 1989.

Piercing Fans International Quarterly, c/o Gauntlet, Inc. 8720 Santa Monica Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90069.

William Rubin, ed, *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1984.

Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives*, University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Bruce Metcalf writes a regular column for Metalsmith.

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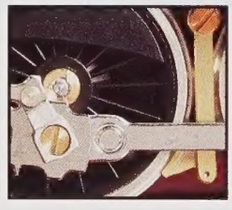

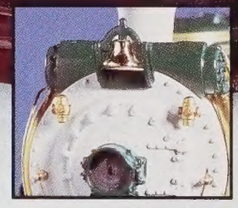

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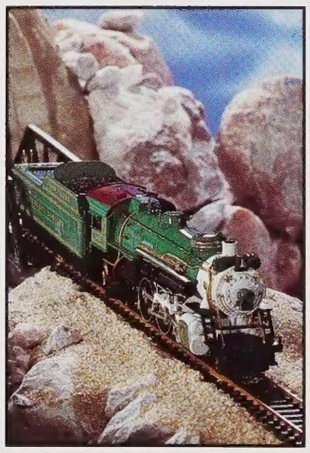

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1991 NATIONAL METAL COMPETITION

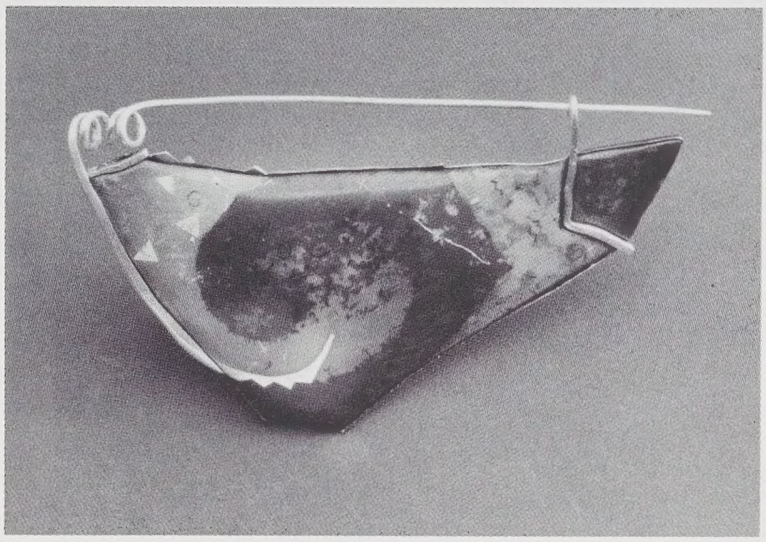
by Robert L. Cardinale

Cu_3, as a national competitive metals exhibition, was a sequel – albeit more than ten years later – to Copper 2 (1980) and to the Copper, Brass and Bronze Competition in 1977. The first two exhibitions were shown at the Museum of Art at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Cu_3 was shown at the Old Pueblo Museum, also in Tucson. It was installed by the director of the museum, Diane M. Johnson, and her staff, Philip Renner, Phyllis Rapagnani and James Jenkins.

All three exhibitions were conceived to show the richness, versatility and diversity of expression possible in copper. Michael Croft, professor of art and head of the metals program at the University of Arizona, was co-director of the first two exhibitions and project director of the current exhibition. In 1977 he stated in the catalog for the first exhibition, "Competitive exhibitions, especially those emphasizing metalwork, have for the most part rewarded the precious metals of silver and gold, overlooking what I feel is the most creative and imaginative work being done. It was the desire to see an exhibition spotlighting the rewarding expression in the materials of copper and copper derivatives that led to my proposing this exhibition."

When I was told of his plans for Cu_3 after such a long hiatus, I asked why. Has the field changed that much? Is such a show really needed? What are your expectations for the exhibition? My questions couldn't really be answered until the show was mounted, and so I agreed to help in any way I could. My current professional activities didn't allow extensive involvement in the planning and implementation of the exhibition, but I did agree to serve as one of the jurors of the exhibition. Eleanor Moty, professor of art at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, internationally known for her work in photo etching, and David Pimentel, professor of art at Arizona State University at Tempe, known for his large-scale vessel works in copper, were the other jurors.

Photography by Dominic Oldershaw, except on page 15, left.



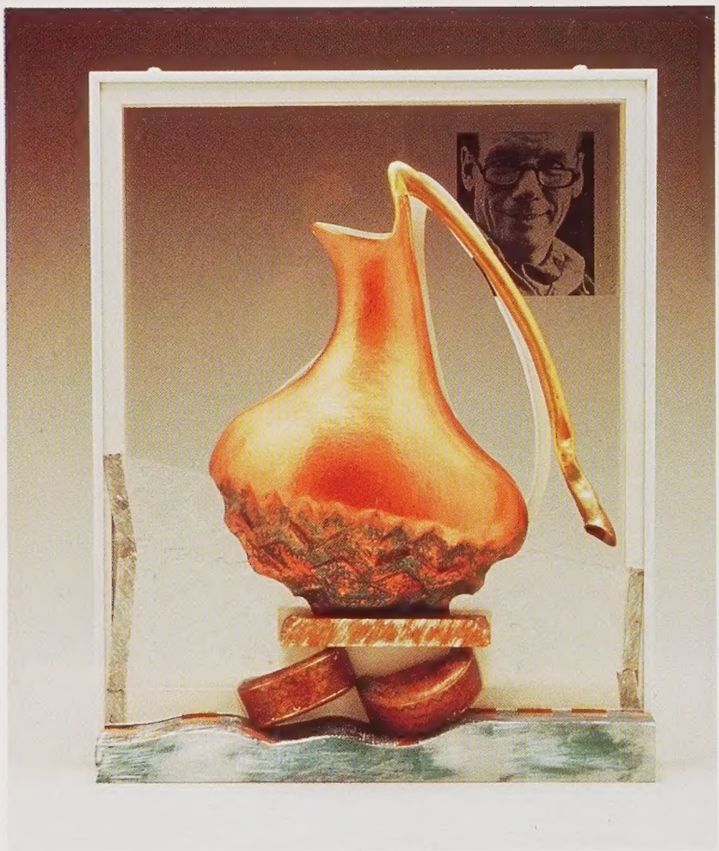
Celia O'Kelley Braswell, *Untitled Brooch*
enamel on copper, sterling setting
2 x 3⅜ x ⅛"

Unfortunately, the jurying was done from slides, as was the case for the two previous copper exhibitions. There were 1,200 submissions to Cu_3 (162 pieces and 77 artists were shown), as compared to 1300 submissions to Copper 2 (233 pieces and 176 artists were shown) and 1200 to the first exhibition (236 works and 157 artists shown) in 1977. Clearly Cu_3 was the smallest of the three exhibitions, both in the number of pieces shown and the number of artists represented. I can only speculate on the reasons for the smaller number of artists entering and being shown in Cu_3. The timing and coverage of the call for entries to the exhibition may have had some impact. Certainly the great hiatus between Copper 2 and Cu_3 was a factor, as there was very little overlap in the artists who exhibited in both shows. And finally, as suggested by Eleanor Moty, many students and established professionals are doing very exciting work in nonmetal jewelry and sculptural forms – with materials such as aluminum, wood, paper and plastic. The prospectus stated that the pieces had to be made predominantly of copper or copper derivatives. While this restriction may have been necessary to examine the state of the creativity and expression in the material and for historic continuity, it certainly was a limitation that needs to be questioned if this exhibition is to become a continuing one.

My purpose in this article is to describe what the exhibition did show, especially in some of the pieces selected for awards, compare the three exhibitions in general, and make some analytic observations about the field of metalsmithing and jewelry as indicated by what was and was not in the exhibition.

Selection for awards was based on "evidence of a consistent maturity of expression; a unified body of work showing a strong synthesis of concept, design, and technique. We sought work which was conceptually sophisticated, technically masterful, and visually fresh. In particular, we sought the distinctive and shunned the derivative" (Cu_3 catalog, Jurors' Statement, p. 12).

While there was not an abundance of jewelry submitted to the exhibition, the very sensitive patinaed metal pins of Patricia Telesco (Huntsville, AL) are truly beautiful, functional (about 1¾ inches square) and intimately personal pieces. The five small enamel brooches of Celia O'Kelley Braswell (Makanda, IL) certainly acknowledge the breakthrough copper enamel techniques and expressions of Jamie Bennett, not as derivative, but much in the same way that the great abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky is referenced by the abstract expressionists of the 1950s. The sensitive and mature necklaces of Jan Yager (Philadelphia, PA) also deserve praise in the jewelry category.



William Baran-Mickle, *A Successful Season*
copper, brass, wood, patina, paint, Plexiglas, xerography
20½ x 16¼ x 4½″

Lucinda M. Brogden, *Phone Intrusions 2*
bronze, pewter, Masonite, paint
17¼ x 18¾ x 1½″

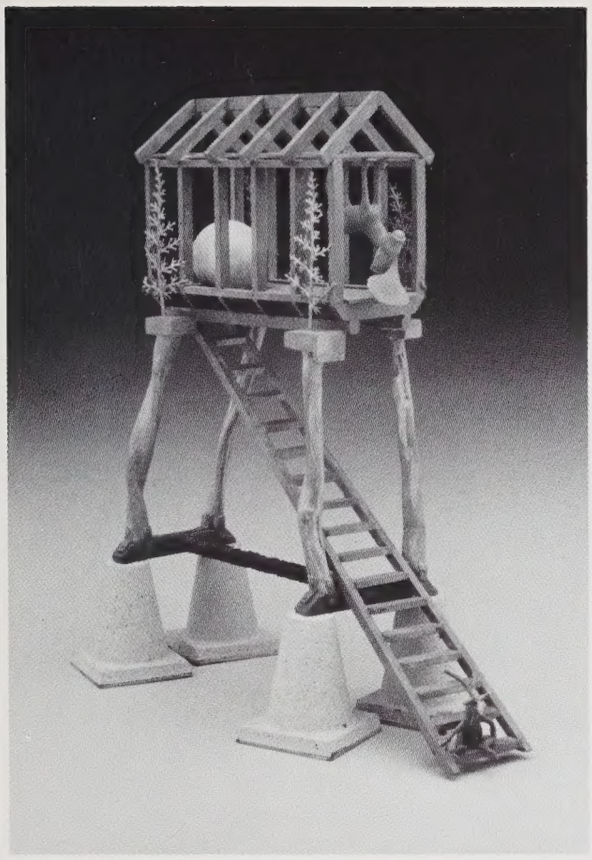
I was particularly intrigued by the two pieces of William Baran-Mickle (Pittsford, NY), *Johan Rhodes Update* and *A Successful Season.* Both pieces are approximately 20 inches high, both contain real vessels but used as symbolic forms, and both are presented as simultaneously framed and sculptural objects. Baran-Mickle is making art statements by reaching back to the recent and essential roots of metalsmithing and calling or recalling our attention to them. The *Johan Rhodes Update* takes the classic, quintessential functional pitcher form of "modern" hollowware, but roughly rather than smoothly finished, puts it on a pedestal, adorns it with frivolous squiggles and pseudo-fashionable post-modern motifs and colors, and then frames the entire composition in a deconstructivist, disjointed picture frame.

A Successful Season is a tribute or memorial to the master artist/metalsmith Hans Christensen, a teacher of Baran-Mickle's at Rochester Institute of Technology. It makes reference to Christensen's important work with Georg Jensen and the strong influence that Christensen's style and teaching had in the U.S. The death of Christensen in an auto accident is evidenced by the heavy tire tread marks chased into the base of the copper pitcher and etched into the Plexiglas of the picture plane. *A Successful Season* refers not only to the life of Christensen as a teacher and metalsmith but to the end of that life and stylistic influence in U.S. metalsmithing.

These pieces are made for the artist/metalsmith and do for us what Warhol did for the art world when he took the Campbell's soup can and forced us to focus upon the common object in our environment as art. Baran-Mickle's pieces are wonderful and yet myopic examples of the self-reflexive nature of the contemporary metalsmithing and jewelry world.

Lucinda Brogden (Rochester, NY) was another artist whose work was fresh, very contemporary and yet deeply rooted in art history and the techniques and processes of metalsmithing. Her chased and repousséd pieces of sheet bronze (four were shown) are very carefully planned and yet chaotic-appearing compositions about people and events very important in her personal life. She uses a combination of traditional cold and Japanese hot pitch techniques to attain very sharp lines and great surface depth in the compositions.

Objects become symbols, especially in *Phone Intrusions 2*, where the sharply incised phone cord becomes the tangled but distant connection between her and her husband, then living in different cities. The actual process of the chasing and repoussé work becomes a ritual, almost a liturgy, for her as she works out and works through the life incidents she reveals in her pieces. Her compositions hark back to the early Italian Renaissance and show a chaotic flatness but vivid movement similar to that found in the painting of *The Battle of San Romano* by Paolo Uccello.



Rand M. Schiltz, *Put The Dog Out*
bronze and lacquer
10¼ x 11½ x 5¼"

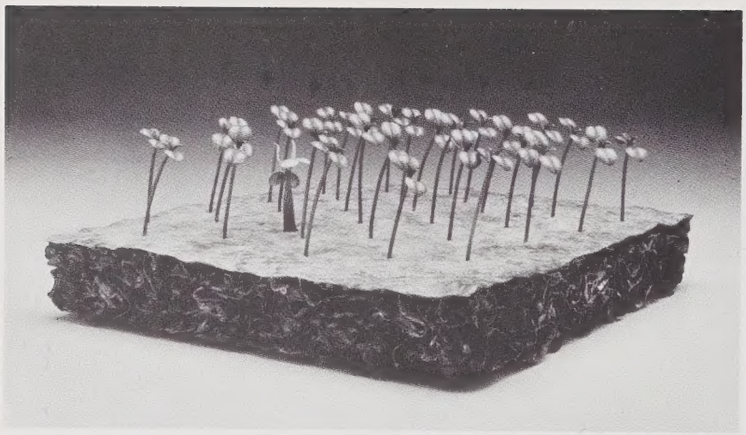
Bruce Clark, *Beggars Bowls*
cast bronze, inlaid silver, gold, copper
4 x 5 x 2"

The tradition of pure beauty and formal elegance in precious and nonprecious metals throughout history is certainly upheld by the works of Stephen Walker (Andover, NY). His incredible 9-inch-high bowl (cover image) incorporates married metal, a variation of mokumé-gane and a Damascus steel type of pattern welding. The patterns of copper, sterling, nickel and bronze, while appearing accidental, are in fact careful, almost mathematically planned. The piece is actually number 33 in an extended series. I especially liked the edges because they show a real vitality and they contrast excitingly with the elegant but controlled crazy-quilt pattern of the bowl.

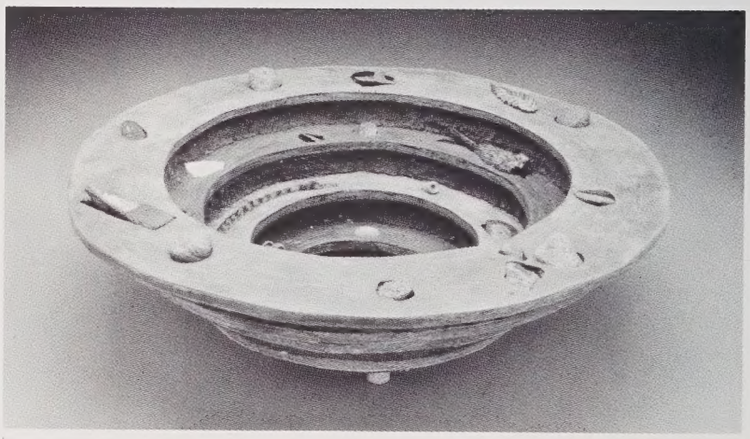
Walker is representative of the contemporary metalsmith/jeweler who makes a living from his work rather than teaching at a college or university. He effectively manages to produce fine works for sale at major ACE and other shows as well as to make museum exhibition pieces with the same integrity and techniques of his multiple pieces. It should be noted that he also exhibited two pieces in Copper 2 and both were sold from the exhibition.

The painted bronze castings of Rand Schiltz (San Jose, CA) presented some fresh forms and whimsical themes. They appear to be multiple piece castings (four were exhibited) that are joined together almost as if they were folk art wood constructions. The colors are light and lyrical, and the subject matter is very narrative and certainly erotic. Jurying from slides can provide some real surprises. Since the works are only about 14 inches high, the detailed and erect male genitalia on three of the pieces were totally unnoticed by the jurors when they viewed the slides. However, they were noticed by many viewers, a few of whom let it be known to the museum personnel that they were not pleased. To the credit of the museum director, the pieces remained on full view throughout the exhibition.

Bruce Clark (Tucson, AZ) presented some very impressive pieces in his four *Beggars Bowls*, all cast bronze with copper, gold and silver inlay. The bowls are thick – about ¼ inch or more – castings of human skull fragments and measure only about 5 inches in the longest dimension. The inside surface or concave portion of the skull bowls are inlaid with elegant and ancient-looking geometric patterns of colored metals. The pieces have an incredible richness and leave one with the intense desire to pick one up to feel the surface, heft and balance of the piece.



Keiko Kubota, *Diary 2, April 30, 1973. School Life*
copper
10 x 17 x 17″



Chris Theodore Ramsay, *Nature's Circle*
copper, patina, soil, found objects
6 x 32″ d.

Among my favorites in the exhibition were the pieces of Keiko Kubota (Brooklyn, NY). Five of her very personal pieces were shown. Each of them is approximately 17 inches square and about 3 to 10 inches high. They begin with her birth, move to her school life in Japan, her first visit to the U.S., her wedding and finally her unknown future. The pieces are all correct: the size and scale are in harmony with the concepts; the techniques, imagery, word stampings, incisings and coloration of metal all work together to present a unified expressive message of searching and progressing not only through life but through a skill and knowledge acquisition in metalsmithing.

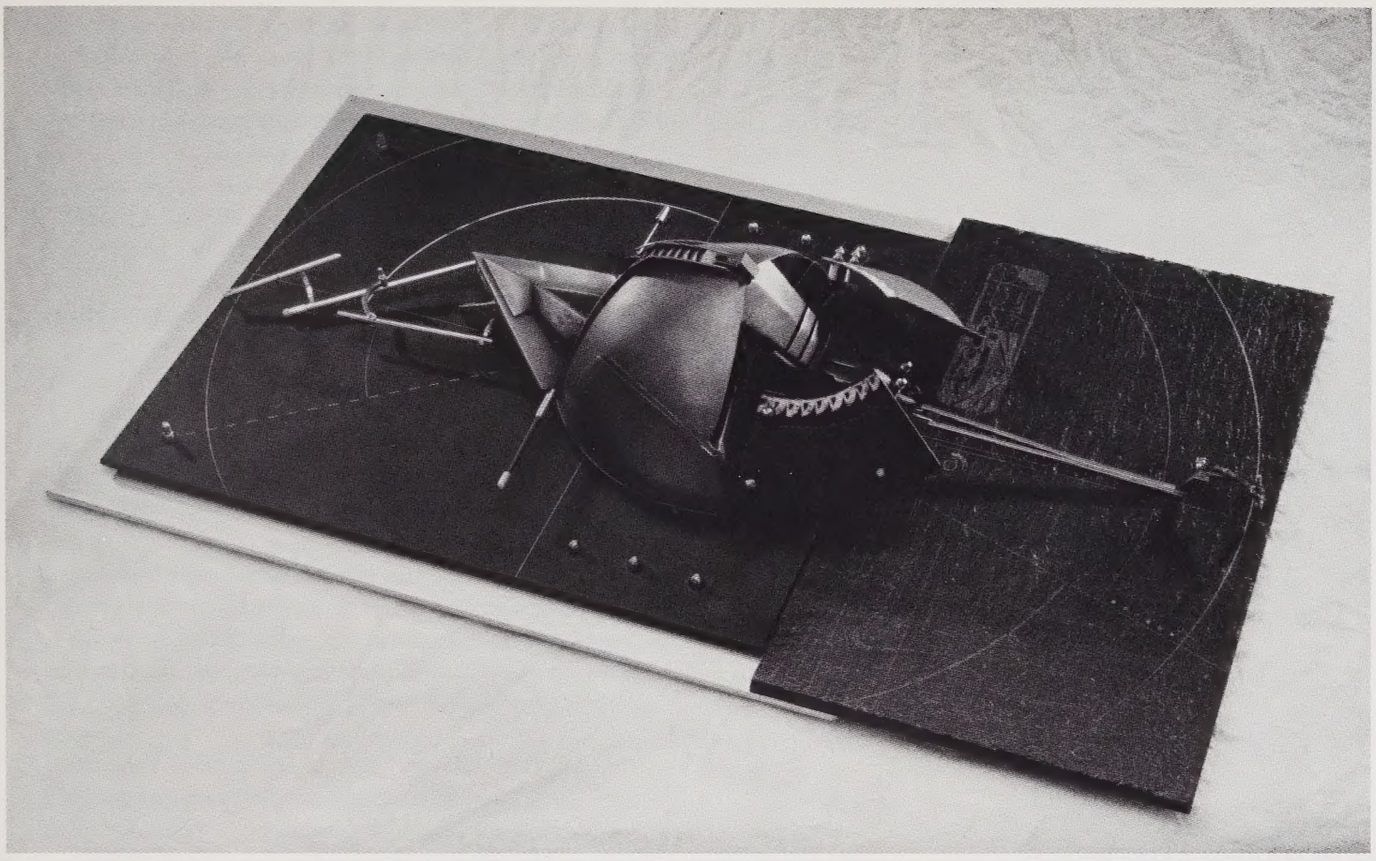
The works of Chris Theodore Ramsay (Stillwater, OK) presented some real problems for the jurors and for many, many of the viewers. Two of his pieces were exhibited, both in a rather large, 32-inch diameter format. Both can loosely be classified as vessel constructed with alternating layers of heavy greenish patinaed copper circles and a reddish clay-like soil. Both also have dried and decayed found objects in them. The piece entitled *Nature's Circle* even incorporates a dead bird and what appears to be a braid of human or animal hair. These pieces were easily the toughest in the exhibition, and I was glad to see them as a contrast to some of the beautiful, polished and elegant forms.

David Alan Peterson (Saratoga Springs, NY) exhibited three fantasy instruments – two of them over 6 feet high – that are marvels of technique and technology from some other planet displaying an advanced technology that gives one the sense that all is well in some other world, if not in our own. Peterson's pieces also manifest a "harmony" of scale and technique that totally "fits" with their fantasy content and message.

The scale issue is one that constantly had to be faced in the exhibition along with that of "harmony" of concept and technique. While the pieces are excellent, I was left with a real sense of uneasiness of scale by the works of Robly Glover and Nancy Slagle (both from Lubbock, TX). Although elegant, the pieces seem to want to be much larger than they actually are.

The pieces of Dale Wedig (Marquette, MI) and Randy Long (Bloomington, IN) are a beautiful contrast in the use of painted copper. Both deny the nature of the metal with paint, but Wedig teases the viewer with carefully cut lines in the paint revealing the copper. His forms read almost like wood, but the edges surprise you with the crispness of metal.

Long's vessel forms are small yet wonderful works of architecture that display monumental height despite being less than 12 inches. This is the kind of control of scale that excites the viewer and shows one of the unique strengths of the metalsmith. The works of Robert Gehrke (Eau Claire, WI) and Beverly Penn (San Marcos, TX) also show an excellent command of scale that makes the message of these small pieces very strong.



David Alan Peterson, *Dolmen/Plotter*
copper, brass, nickel, aluminum, slate, titanium, gold leaf
6 x 18 x 32"

In addition, the strong and mature vessels of Elliott Pujol (Manhattan, KS), Thomas Muir (Bowling Green, OH), Brigid O'Hanrahan (Philadelphia, PA), Robert Coogan (Smithville, TN), Claire Sanford (Bedford, MA), Sarah Perkins (Makanda, IL), Susan Ewing (Oxford, OH), Helen Shirk (La Mesa, CA), Patrice Case (Mt. Morris, NY) and Marvin Jensen (Penland, NC) added an elegance and historic continuity to the exhibition. They deserve serious consideration as the subject of an entire article.

The element of humor, especially the outrageous, that was so evident in Copper 2 seems to have been more subdued and controlled in this exhibition, but there is certainly a lot of joy in *Oilcan Ballet* by Lynn Whitford (Madison, WI) and a good bit of outrageous indulgence in Randall Reid's (Bloomington, IL) *Ring Containers 3 & 4* and Michael Bennett's (DeKalb, IL) *Bird Regenerator* and the other two pieces in his *Allusive Box Series.* I was also intrigued by the trompe l'oeil candlesticks of Myra Mimlitsch Gray (Lafayette, IN) and the captivating ones of Boris Bally (Pittsburgh, PA), as well as the lively *A-B-C Bowls* of Jean Mandeberg (Olympia, WA). Good metalsmiths still go to extreme and almost surrealistic limits to make a statement.

As an exhibition, the show speaks to the field of metalsmithing and jewelry and simultaneously is a populist show. As a populist show it has been seen and enjoyed by thousands. For many, many viewers, it has been enjoyable, unintimidating and simply marvelous.

To the field of metalsmithing, it says that the qualities of the metal itself are very seductive and that the techniques needed in making works of art in this material can override the development of concept and expressive message. It reminds us that the harmony of scale, technique and message is all-important in a work of art and that metalsmiths and jewelers have a unique responsibility to strive for and to resolve this harmony. And while Cu_3 was a wonderful exhibition, the copper shows are complete; another is not needed.

What is needed now is a comprehensive biennial metals exhibition that is not competitive but rather a carefully curated selection of the best and most exciting new work that is being done both by young artists as well as by mature professionals. Ideally the exhibition should be staged by a museum, with selections from the exhibition prepared to travel in the U.S. and abroad. I commend the Old Pueblo Museum and the contributors to Cu_3 for their fine work. Now let's move forward.

Robert L. Cardinale is an artist, writer and former president of the Museum of New Mexico Foundation in Santa Fe, NM.

A catalog for the exhibition is available through the Old Pueblo Museum, 7401 N. La Cholla Blvd., Tuscon, AZ 85741.

BENEATH SURFACE AND FORM

Lynne E. Hull

BY
WILLIAM BARAN-MICKLE

Lynne Hull is a vessel maker as well as a teacher, a jeweler, and a founding member of the Seattle Metals Guild. She is a supporter of the community she lives in. This is evident in her pride of place, the Pacific Northwest, when she has the chance to order a Ballard Bitter Ale. Lynne Hull lives and works in a small house literally in the midst of an industrial section of Seattle called Ballard, also home of the Ballard Brewery. The least of what she is is what she's become best known for, as a metal spinner of vessel forms.

So seemingly rare is the use of spinning in our field that Hull has risen to a visibility where the technique she uses is often more the focus than is her work. It has been a personal and quiet crusade for more than 10 years to elevate the spun metal form from the lower-class association of industrial design and production into a legitimate and beautiful format and technique worthy of any other metal technique and any other art form.

Hull probably was not aware, when she began spinning metal, that Soetsu Yanagi had come to the same conclusion as she when in 1954, as founder of the Japan Folkcraft Museum in Tokyo, he wrote about the crossroad between man's creativity and the machine:

> No machine can compare with a man's hands. Machinery gives speed, power, complete uniformity, and precision, but it cannot give creativity, adaptability, freedom, heterogeneity. These the machine is incapable of, hence the superiority of the hand, which no amount of rationalism can negate. Man prefers the creative and the free to the fixed and standardized.
>
> The machine, of course, came into being for man's use and advantage; therefore, we need not avoid it but should find a way of using it more cleverly than we have done hitherto.
>
> – "Toward a Standard of Beauty," 1954 [1]

Hull has risen, intuitively, to this challenge through her fortitude and her personal and professional achievements. She considers all of these part of a continuous process without end. She has succeeded in establishing a high standard for her work and deserves our attention.[2]

Hull found her unusual technical niche as a graduate student at the School for American Craftsmen at Rochester Institute of Technology and has evolved with it as an artist. Spinning on a lathe is now secondary to her creative process. Spinning is the vehicle she uses to generate voluminous forms; it is, actually, a sketching process where she merges the industrial with the artistic. There is a host of reasons why Hull has chosen these particular vessel forms, the spinning technique and materials. Together they combine to form a sophisticated vocabulary that is coherent, flexible and personal.

[1] Yanagi, Soetsu, *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty* (collected writings adapted by Bernard Leach), Kodansha, 1980, p.108.

[2] It is only fair that I disclose that Lynne Hull is not only a colleague but a friend. We attended the same graduate program at RIT and earned our MFA degrees in 1981. Although she returned to the West Coast immediately thereafter and I remained in New York, I have followed her career and have never ceased to be impressed by the quality of her work.

LEFT
Vertical Basket #1
copper, brass, patina
15 x 3″, 1990

RIGHT
Vertical Basket #7
copper, wood, patina
17 x 3″, 1991

Work Style

Each piece, whether it is a one-of-a-kind sculptural vessel or a limited edition work, is actually unique in the same way that a thrown or handbuilt clay object is unique. Each object is spun and stacked into an arrangement and must be different in subtle ways. However, Hull goes far beyond the notion that machined reproductions are the same. She wants her objects to show their own evolutionary history, the processes of their making.

Tooling lines are left intact on the surface of a spun pot after the spinning and are not burnished smooth or removed. The various elements added to a central form are frequently left with working marks, such as the dimples from her Beverly shears. (Dimples are normally removed or avoided with a protective rubber pad.) This philosophy does not extend to uncut edges, overhangs or messy joints, which could be dangerous or alter the basic form. Through these "fingerprints" one can imagine discovering the mood of the maker in her act of creativity.

Hull's integration of the technical with the organic may be seen as a synthesis of influences from two of her teachers.[3] Fully cognizant that young students tend to create work identified with a school or a specific instructor, Hull nonetheless sought the advantages of each educational environment. She was determined to remain tuned in to her own inner voice. John Marshall's sculptural silversmithing style was organic in approach, with rugged, asymmetric forms. We may see Marshall's influence in Hull's leaving the marks of the industrial process on her piece. She is comfortable throwing her forms off center, their body segments and handles centered or tilted. Her use of multiple forms creates a whole that is larger than the sum of its parts.

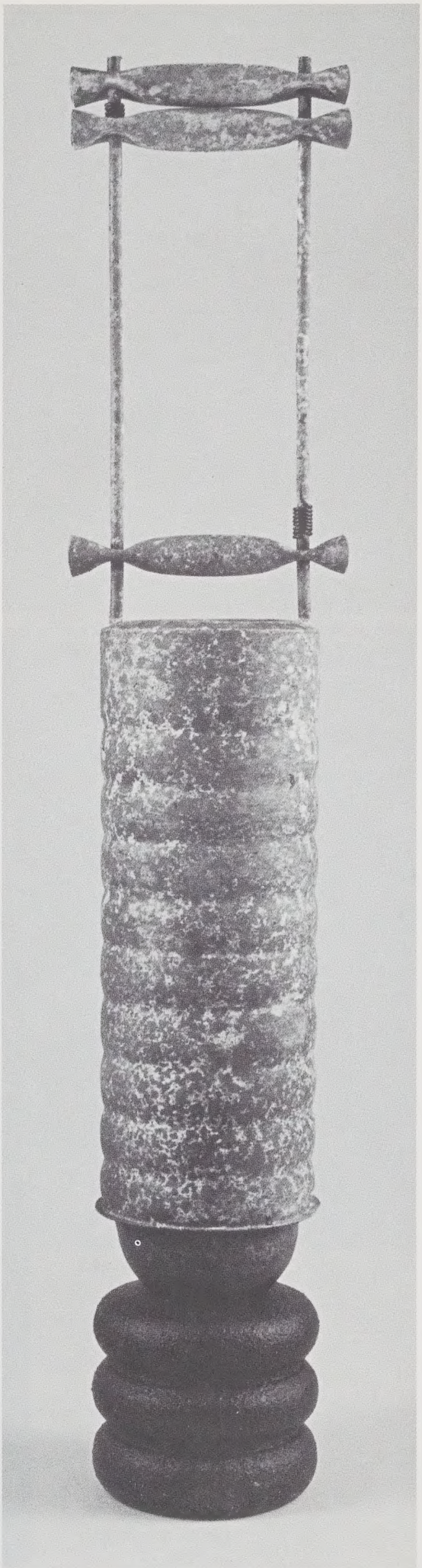
There is also a trace of Gary Griffin's influence as an artist and teacher on Hull. Learning a variety of machine processes at RIT under Griffin also meant dealing with his conceptual challenge to go beyond competence to personal expression. As was evident in Griffin's own work of the late 1970s, the "clever" use of the industrial machine was tantamount to any other artistic endeavor. Invention, experimentation and practicality could all be used to find new form, new surface treatments and artistic expression.

In Hull's creative process the patina is not the end of the work. She frequently applies a patina to a form in order to better "see" the aesthetic arrangements. She has no aversion to removing a surface treatment, trying a different one, or restacking the objects in pursuit of the feel and effects she is seeking.

Happenstance could be considered a part of Hull's working style. Beyond working with forms, she welcomes influences from left field. These may include a new way of looking at industrial products that spark in her an imaginative response. For example, she found copper heating coils, which come notched in continuous round sections, to be decorative yet practical. She uses this product for handles and other decorative elements and finds it completely compatible with her aesthetic.

Her *Vertical Basket* series provides another example of Hull's innovation. A friend was tearing down a building and discovered a large amount of 3-inch copper tubing. Not wanting to waste it, he literally dropped 60 feet of it on Hull's doorstep. Hull decided to remove the sharp bit from a tubing cutter and replaced it with another bit she machined herself. This enabled her to create forms that may be notched at any interval she wants. The result, as with *Vertical Basket #7*, is a beautiful, intricate form.

[3] Hull received her BFA from the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1978. John Marshall was the professor of that program. She received her MFA degree from the School for American Craftsmen, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York, in 1981. Gary Griffin and Hans Christensen were the professors of that program.



Work Content and Market Forces

Over the years Hull has accumulated elemental features that can be read nearly as well as a tree can be read through an examination of its annual growth rings. An early favorite is a handle, an arching, near-semicircle of three narrow lengths of tubing visually held together at one point by a modest, simple wrap of wire. This decorative element placed off center echoed Hull's interest in Japanese packaging design. Its purpose – that of bundling – represented the theme of gathering harvest crops. This wrapping element has remained in her work, although the styles of handles and other treatments change frequently.

Another element that has remained in her work is the spiral of tubing, nearly always aluminum and painted with automobile lacquer, that surrounds the opening of the container. Its calm gesture lifts the eye upward. Nearly all of Hull's containers have a mouth, a remnant of the vessel's function. Yet, if liquid were to fill the body, it could only leave by evaporation. These spirals can be read as releasing the spiritual essences contained in the vessel, and therefore from our own.

Hull made this association early on, in response to the tea ceremony and the development of utensils that assist nourishment, and tied these to the role of the woman through history. She looks upon vessels as a metaphor for human form. Moreover, "they define a space and create a presence of their own that I see as representing woman...and symbolize woman's ability to give life."[4]

[4] Hull, Lynne, *A Discussion of My Work*, masters thesis, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1985, pp. 12 – 13.

Vertical Basket #23 (aka *sister*)
copper, aluminum, patina, auto lacquer
15 x 11″, 1991

Two Narratives

Basket #16
(aka *Burial Piece*)
copper, aluminum, patina, auto lacquer
8 x 15″, 1984

Basket #4
(aka *Upward Bound*)
copper, aluminum, patina, auto lacquer
16 x 11″, 1986

Basket #16, 1984

In this elegant early vessel we can see narrative content. The broad, wide container sits gently on a black double coil base – like a perfect river pebble set on a stand. The handle is extreme, even heavy, and it runs low over the broad shoulders of the pot. It also obstructs the mouth. The tubing of the handle is stacked, two lengths on the bottom with one short piece resting on top.

The story of this vessel is summed up by its nonpublic title, *Burial Piece*. It was Hull's intention to suggest the environment of the Plains Indians with a broad low profile, flat and exposed to the elements. The handle construction is an allusion to the practice of the Plains Indians who buried their dead above ground. There is a quiet, a calm and a reverence to this sculpture that fit this sentiment.

Basket #4, 1986

Upward Bound is known as *Vessel #4* from 1986. This personal portrait begins with a sharp vertical bowl and has a tall straight handle with three crossbars made of crimped tubing. Again, one bar blocks the mouth abruptly. A lengthy span then reaches up to a tilted bar just beneath a third, straight bar on the very top. Many people have reacted with unease to the tilted crossbar, expressing the wish that it be level and square. Yet this bar is not simply askew or shaken loose. It is, rather, the very symbol of a difficult climb up a ladder, to a new location, a new awareness for oneself. It is a universal wish – if you will – that everyone have the chance or take the risk of moving up and forward in life. It is honest in its portrayal that such an endeavor is not simple, nor assured of an easy step or path.

Hull's elegant, simple vessel forms have much content. Indeed, behind many of her forms and decorative elements lies a narrative, understated and rarely brought out into open discussion. At the nexus of Hull's work is a crossroad that bridges personal intent with technique and the marketplace. Over the years it has been the personal side of her work that has been subdued.

Hull has found it difficult to sell limited editions with personal titles. It is easier to refer to generic titles and number systems such as *Basket Form #14* or *Vertical Basket #10*. Hull feels clients, be they the general public or gallery buyers, are much more comfortable with generic references which are more businesslike. Perhaps this makes them more approachable. After all, these vessels, or "pots," as she calls them, will be used to decorate and enliven someone else's personal environment. On the other hand, this arrangement has also been comfortable for Hull. She has preferred to use this system rather than highlight the personal narrative. She strives to balance the public and the private in pots that appear similar to one another.

Since 1981 Lynne Hull has exhibited steadily and has made her living from her work. Teaching has been a supplement; it has been her work that has sustained her. The path to financial stability has not been easy. When that path has involved the ACE craft fair circuit, Hull has assumed that there is risk in changing the work too drastically within one year. Her creative approach merges the practical with a faith from within that intercedes on her behalf.

A glimpse at Hull's working style reveals a large number of vessel forms, open, closed, and multiples as well as those of differing heights and diameters. From the dozens of variables eventually comes a new form. She often works with a "conceptual series," a direction which allows her to make a variety of baskets that relate to each other. Hull stacks fully round, enclosed forms 3 to 4 high in totemic fashion. She has made series wherein a double or triple stacking of bowl forms exposes inner recesses rather than sealing them shut. These recall the metaphor of the vessel as the body, the exposed self, and provide a challenging glimpse inside ourselves.

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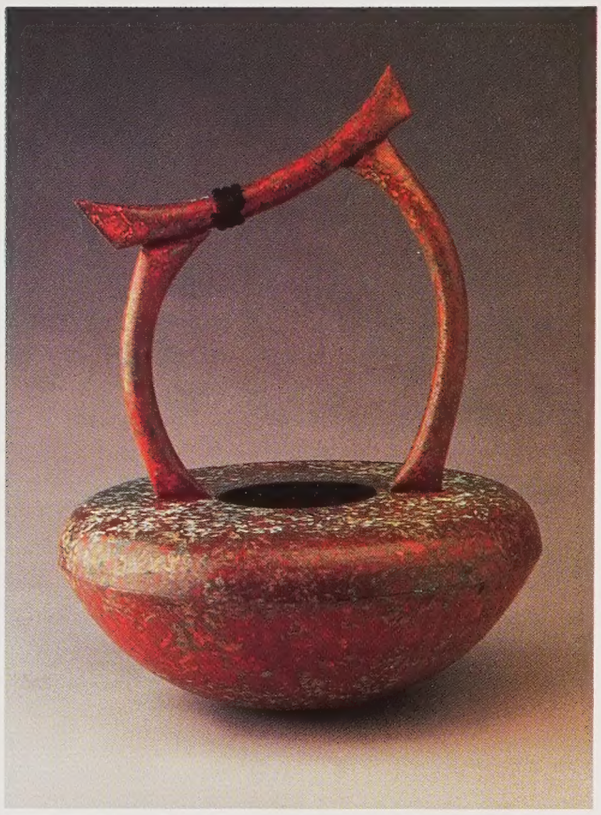
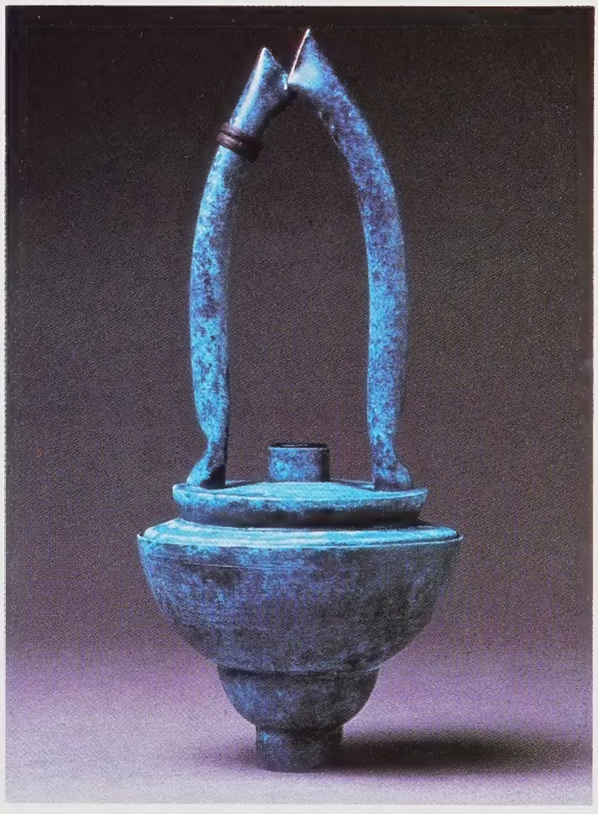




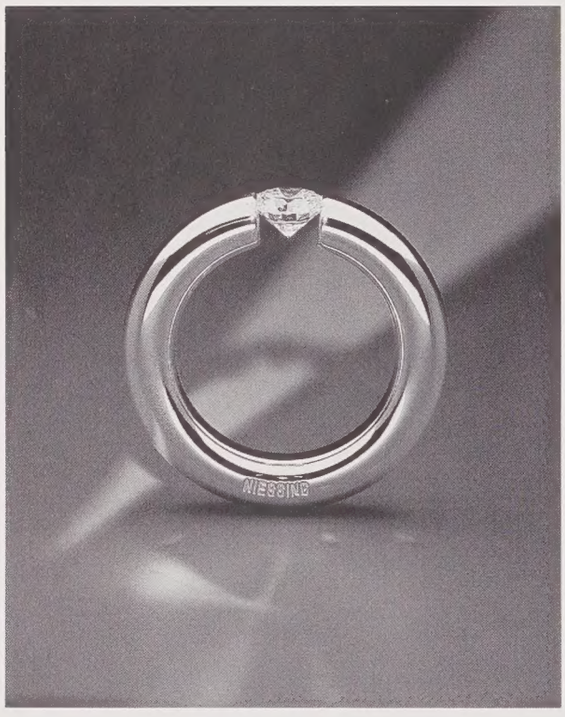
Basket Form #14
copper, aluminum, patina, auto lacquer
14 x 10", 1989

Vertical Basket #10
copper, patina
13 x 6", 1991

Profit by Design

A Profile of The Niessing Company

by Donald Friedlich and Judith Mitchell



The Niessing tension ring
18K gold "Supla" and diamond

When we became engaged two years ago, we bought a Niessing tension ring, a simple band in which a diamond is held in place by nothing more than the pressure of the gold ring around it. The reactions to it have been interesting.

One friend, long married, regards the diamond trapped in its place by tension as the perfect metaphor for matrimony. Others, including many skilled and schooled jewelers, see the ring as an accident waiting to happen – they cannot believe the metal can hold a diamond fast.

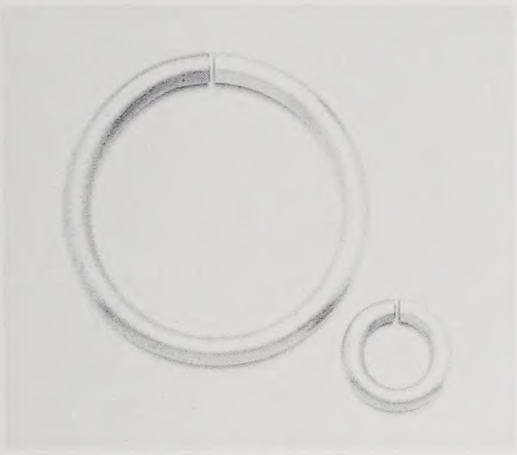
For us, the ring provides one of life's delicious pleasures – the chance to have it both ways. We get to own a traditional symbol of betrothment and we get to confound those who insist that diamond rings require polished gold, huge rocks and little blue boxes marked Tiffany. We get to be conventional and we get to be different. We get to say something about who we are as a couple through our jewelry.

This, according to Niessing's manager, Jochen Exner, makes us typical Niessing customers. "We make jewelry for people who want to communicate with it, who want to express themselves through it," he says.

Despite the company's frequent use of technical wizardry, Niessing's product is not about technique, nor is it about craft, despite the unusual emphasis on handwork. And, although Niessing works closely with artists and has had work in many of Europe's leading avant-garde exhibitions and galleries, the company will not be drawn into the "is it art" issue. "We have artists working for us, but we do not make art," says Exner firmly. The work is simply about good design. It would be at home in the Museum of Modern Art's late-20th-century design section, displayed between a Michael Graves teapot and a Movado watch.

Situated in northwest Germany, the company has a staff of 200, including 85 goldsmiths proficient in traditional handwork, 65 technicians specializing in computerized and high-tech machinery, a sales force that works closely with retailers, and one full-time employee who deals with copyright infringements. The company also employs 3 artistically trained designers and hires other artist-designers on a freelance basis.

Hermann Niessing, a classically trained jeweler who apprenticed in Italy, established the company in Pforzheim in 1873. He left the German jewelry center several years later, moving the company to the picturesque town of Vreden, renowned for its pastoral beauty. "It was not a businessman's decision," says Exner, his great-grandson and a business school graduate. Nonetheless, the move turned out to have a profound impact on the company. Physically removed from the influence of the jewelry industry, Niessing has found it easy to ignore trends and traditions.



Solid ring and hollow bracelet
18K gold "Iris"
Designer: Matthias Monnich

In 1914, Exner's parents, Ursula Niessing Exner and Fritz Exner, assumed leadership of the company. A student of modern jewelry, Ursula Exner remained a powerful influence until her death in 1986. She introduced innovative designs to the company and hired designers with art school backgrounds and a full understanding of process and material. As a result, the company, then known as a leading producer of traditional wedding bands, began developing the quintessential Niessing look – geometric and graphic forms, carefully finished and detailed, made with state-of-the-art technology whenever possible and age-old handwork whenever necessary.

One of the lines Ursula Exner designed during that early period of innovation and experimentation was Setario, a system in which rings of different shapes and shades of gold nest against one another. Brides and grooms who sought out the Niessing name, expecting the same gold bands worn by their parents and grandparents, found themselves fashioning their own configurations, creating their own spectrum of colors and design. Setario required the consumer to actively participate in the design process, to engage in a dialogue with the jewelry. The Exners were, in effect, training their own market.

The family's affinity for contemporary design was not the only factor propelling them in their new direction. Market studies indicating that the demand for wedding rings would soon fall off as a result of the declining German birthrate also played a critical role.

"When the studies appeared, we realized that our primary market would be significantly reduced in twenty years," Exner says. "It was then that we formulated our new product philosophy. We decided to do contemporary jewelry as our main line. We didn't want to be linked to one certain style of one certain period. We wanted to change as times changed."

Ursula Exner continued developing new lines, remaining fascinated by the work and ideas of the European art jewelry community, including its repudiation of precious materials, a concept that intrigued the company but which they eventually rejected. "We finally concluded that, for us, material wasn't political – design was political," Exner says. "We felt there had to be a way to come up with a design philosophy that included precious metals and diamonds."

In the 1970s, Niessing made a concerted effort to incorporate platinum into its work. The decision was based on both aesthetic and business considerations. As the result of an aggressive promotional campaign by South African platinum mines, the metal was readily available and on the public's mind. Because the German jewelry industry had long neglected platinum, largely because of restrictions placed on its use during the war years, the look was fresh. "It gave us the chance to create a new look without forsaking precious metal," says Exner.

Niessing became known for its use of platinum, and in the early 1980s the company's facility with the material contributed to the development of the tension ring, arguably the company's most successful design innovation and technical achievement.

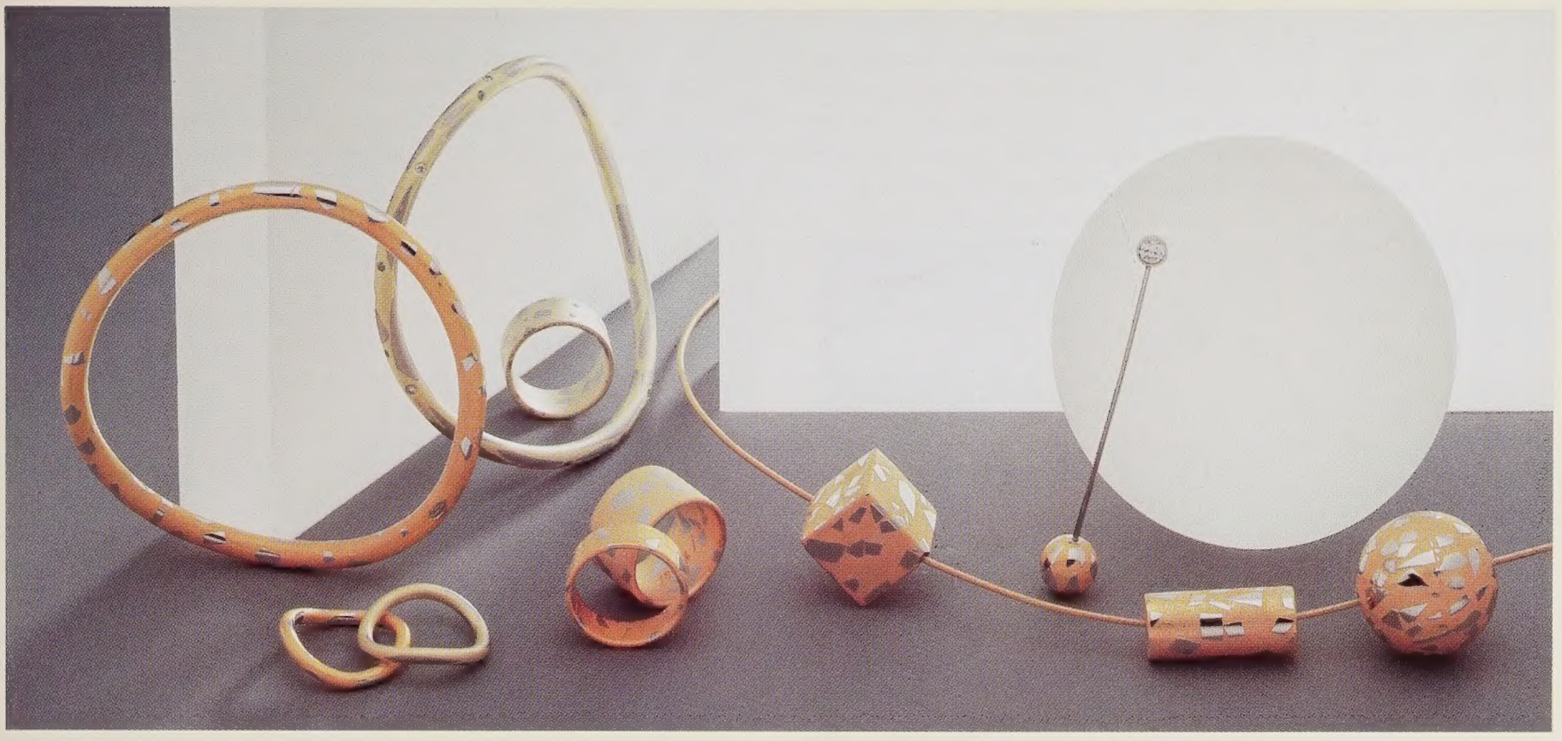
The invention of the tension ring is directly attributable to Ursula Exner's interest in contemporary studio jewelry. "We always had advisers and friends around the company whose ideas about reduction and minimalism influenced my mother very much," Exner remembers. "We decided to apply these ideas to our rings. We wanted there to be only one clean, pure style element in each ring – but we wanted that element to be very distinctive.

"We began trying to reduce the setting for diamonds. We kept reducing it further and further until someone jokingly suggested that we take the entire setting away and set the stone in the ring shank. Everyone found this very funny."

When the laughter subsided, the designers found themselves unable to let go of the concept. Almost to prove it couldn't be done, the team, which then consisted of Ursula Exner, Norbert Muerrle and Walter Wittek, began experimenting with prototype rings. They faced enormous technical problems.

It was silversmith Wittek who solved these problems and produced the first tension ring. Wittek fashioned a ring from platinum, at that time the only precious metal sufficiently static to hold a diamond rigid. He hand hammered and work hardened the closed ring, then cut the stressed shank. Next, he forced the exposed ends apart, creating an opening in which he inserted a diamond. When the expanded shank was allowed to contract, it trapped the diamond in place. After more than a year of careful scientific experimentation, Wittek was able to generate enough tension to hold the diamond securely. The physical qualities unique to platinum, with which the company was now so conversant, maximized the visual qualities unique to diamonds.

18K gold and
platinum necklaces
Designer: Annelies Planteydt

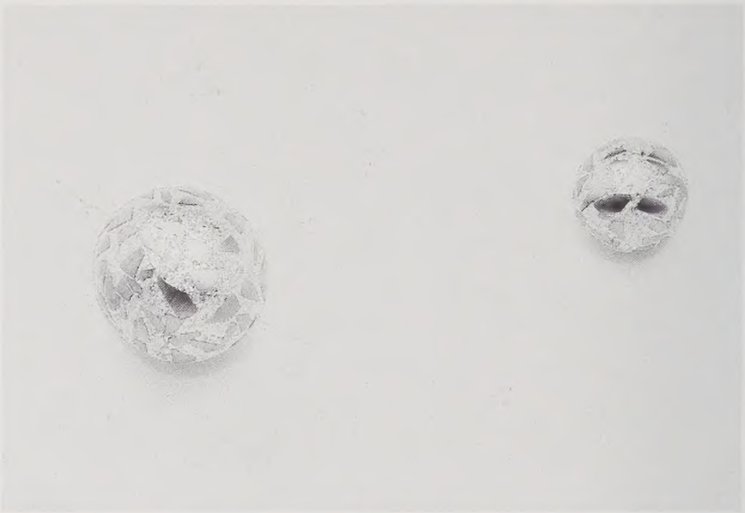


Rings, bracelets and beads of "Terrazzo,"
a surface of 24K gold and platinum
Designer: Christine Kube
Niessing chain

Rings of 18K gold, platinum and diamonds
Note top right ring with inverted diamond

Diamond and platinum rings

Tension rings and wire rings
18K gold, platinum and diamonds
Wire ring designer: Matthias Monnich



"Terrazzo" beads
24K gold, platinum and nylon

Never before had so much of a stone been unobstructed by its setting. The tension ring is the most significant aesthetic and technical innovation in diamond setting in recent memory. Like so much of Niessing's work, the ring also embodies the two most prominent design credos of the 20th century. In this ring, form definitely follows function and less is certainly more.

"We don't know why the tension ring has been so successful," Exner muses. "We do know that when you see it, you don't forget it. Perhaps this is because you can't believe what you're seeing. You see a diamond floating in air held only by the ring shank. You are astonished. You ask yourself, 'Is this possible?' 'Is this dangerous?'"

Several years later, through another exhaustive effort, Niessing perfected similar pre-stressing technology for a special 18K gold alloy. Today Niessing's design team continues to experiment with the tension ring, finding exciting new variations, improving on the technology.

The current team consists of Sabine Boning, a graduate of Elisabeth Holder's program at Dusseldorf, Pforzheim-trained Petra Weingartner, and Peter Eiber, who studied with Hermann Junger in Munich. A former member, Christine Kube, will soon be rejoining the team.

The team works in a separate building away from production staff and management. Observers describe the team as pampered, receiving from the company whatever it takes to meet their needs and foster their creativity.

The month of May, when Niessing's design year commences, is devoted to experimentation with little interference from management. "We might tell the designers we could use a certain product, like pendants or bracelets, or we may specify price points," says Exner. Otherwise, the team does whatever it wants, however it wants. "They can work on paper or in gold or whatever," says Exner. "They can work as a group or in their private studios. There are no requirements other than to be imaginative." Also during May, the company solicits ideas from the jewelry community at large.

As the year progresses, designs are evaluated, new production techniques mastered and samples distributed to retailers. Once introduced to the marketplace, new designs are given several years to catch on. "It generally takes three to five years for any innovation to be accepted by our market," says Exner. "That's something we learned over time and now plan for."

The designs produced in-house are attributed to the team as a whole. "We are interested in making the Niessing design, not in making individual reputations," says Exner. On the other hand, the freelancers, who have included such respected artists as Friedrich Becker in the 1970s and Annelies Planteydt more recently, do receive credit for their work as well as royalties when it sells.

Former design team member Matthias Monnich originally came to Niessing as a freelancer in the early eighties when his teacher, Hermann Junger, introduced him to Ursula Exner. "Junger walked up to my mother at the Intergenta Fair and said, 'Frau Exner, this guy has developed something I think you'll find interesting,'" says Exner. "She did."

The development Junger found so interesting is now marketed by Niessing under the trade name Iris. Iris, a gradation from 24K gold to 14K white, is produced by fusing more than 20 different but matched gold alloys. The visual result is a color change so subtle and seamless it almost appears airbrushed. Presented on neutral circular forms, the color quality of the gold becomes the design focus. The cool geometry of each piece is softened by the gentle color change and brushed finish. In its most effective application, a single interruption in the form provides a point of reference where the contrast in colors is at its most dramatic.

The Iris line and the tension rings are now part of Niessing's "Collection One," a group of work with relatively established appeal. New and more challenging work belongs to "Collection Two." Only a small fraction of the German stores to which Niessing sells is permitted to carry the complete Collection Two line. The company considers most of the second collection too avant-garde for current American taste.

In the United States, Niessing distributes its work through 10 independent galleries and its elegant retail store located on Madison Avenue in New York. The New York store, which also carries work by other jewelers such as Michael Good and the C.F. Dau Company, is intended as a model for other American retailers, an example of how the Niessing product should be presented.

"In deciding what to sell, we look to the demands of the public," says Exner. "My mother was very influenced by the Bauhaus tradition of making work for which there is demand. Were we to make jewelry for which there is no demand, we would no longer be a business. We would be an art workshop where individuals create for reasons other than business purposes."

As a businessman, Exner experiences the same frustrations as many individual art jewelers. "The voice of modern jewelry is not loud enough," says Exner. "It takes many years to establish a line, particularly for a small company. People appreciate design innovation in automobiles but resist it in jewelry. They accept annual changes in fashion, furniture and architecture, but it takes them years to accept any changes in jewelry. Even then, they always insist that jewelry maintain some classical feature."

For Niessing, that classical feature has been precious metal and stones. This sometimes concerns Exner. "There is the risk of attracting customers who are interested in prestige rather than communication," he admits. "Valuing only the preciousness of jewelry is detrimental to jewelry's success in the long term."

But Niessing rarely experiments with alternative materials. The company continues to specialize in small to mid-size series that can be mass produced in precious metals. Many of these series, once viewed as extraordinary innovations both technically and visually, have achieved the timeless quality of classic design. "We try to make products that are identifiable as ours," says Exner. "It would be flattering if, many years from now, people saw our work and said, 'Oh, that's a late-20th-century Niessing.'"

Exner knows better than to expect such acknowledgment today. "Only one or two percent of the whole population cares about the kind of jewelry we make." Still, he is hopeful. "I see the market opening up. To live in Germany now and offer this jewelry is very exciting."

To see a company where artists and industry share common goals, where innovation and profits are not strangers, is also exciting. The door to public acceptance, closed so tightly to most contemporary jewelers, has been opened a crack by the small business in Vreden.

Donald Friedlich is a jeweler and Judith Mitchell is a writer. They live in Providence, Rhode Island.

Mountainscape No. II
925 silver, 24K gold,
anodized titanium and brass screws
8 x 11 x 10", 1989

>
Special Evening
Punch bowl with drawers
for cocktail forks and spoons
925 silver, 24K gold,
black onyx, walnut (inside drawers)
16 x 11 x 20", 1987

Kum-Boo

24K

Overlay on Silver

by Komelia Okim

Kum-Boo (rhymes with "loom low") is a Korean appliqué technique of surface decoration in which pure gold foil is fused onto the surface of finished silver ornaments or objects. The historical background and source of the technique are vague. For thousands of years, Koreans have been using brass, silver and gold wares and utensils for their daily eating and ceremonial purposes. Especially in winter, brass and silver wares are commonly used to keep food at the correct temperature. Since the Korean War ended in 1953, most brass and silver utensils have been replaced by aluminum and stainless steel wares for common use. Beginning in the late '70s, however, a revived interest in traditional customs has aroused a new interest in the use of the finer metals, particularly for ceremonial, birthday, and wedding celebrations and for ancestral memorial services.

Among upper-class people, silver wares are commonly used to display their wealth and to enjoy both their prosperity and status. These wares are also used to test defective, spoiled or poisoned food, and in this regard they echo a role finer metals have played among royal families for centuries. Koreans and some other East Asians believe that the ingestion of pure gold will improve health and well-being. Many herbal medicines are covered with very thin sheets of pure gold. Similarly, acupuncture needles are often made of a high-karat gold in the belief that this metal has properties that will enhance the effectiveness of the treatment.

Many Korean silver utensils are decorated with 24-karat gold overlays in the form of letters and patterns that convey wishes for good health, wealth and longevity. In most cases the ornament is set in the interior of a cup or bowl, or within the bowl of a spoon, so that the food will come in contact with the gold and therefore be able to assimilate its positive characteristics before being ingested.

Though somewhat rare in the United States, and almost unheard-of in the commercial industry here, Kum-Boo is a familiar technique in Korea and has seen wide use for the past decade.

Overview

The term Kum-Boo is derived from *Kum*, which means *gold*, and *Boo*, which can be translated as *attached*. Because of the extreme delicacy of the sheet, conventional soldering is not appropriate and would probably be impossible. In Korean Kum-Boo, 24K sheet gold is diffused onto silver alloys through a combination of pressure and relatively low temperatures (500° – 700°F, 260° – 370°C). The primary tools used in this technique are a stove, hotplate or torch to create the proper heat, and variously shaped polished steel burnishers to press the overlay against the parent object.

In fabricated pieces, all soldering must be completed before beginning the Kum-Boo process. When the piece is fully assembled (except, of course, for elements to be attached with rivets or similar cold connections), the work is cleaned thoroughly in fresh pickle. In order to establish a skin of fine silver, the work is heated again until it shows brown spots, then it is again dipped in the acidic pickle. The piece is rinsed in water and lightly scratchbrushed. This cycle is repeated from three to six times, or until the metal retains its white color even when heated. The work is then dried carefully, with care taken that the delicate skin is not touched.

Overlay pieces are cut from thin 24K gold sheet with scissors or a sharp X-Acto® blade. The gold is laid into place and the work is set onto a hotplate or other heat source and brought up to the correct temperature. The foil overlay is then burnished into the silver, where a diffusion of the molecules of the two metals creates a permanent bond between the two sheets.

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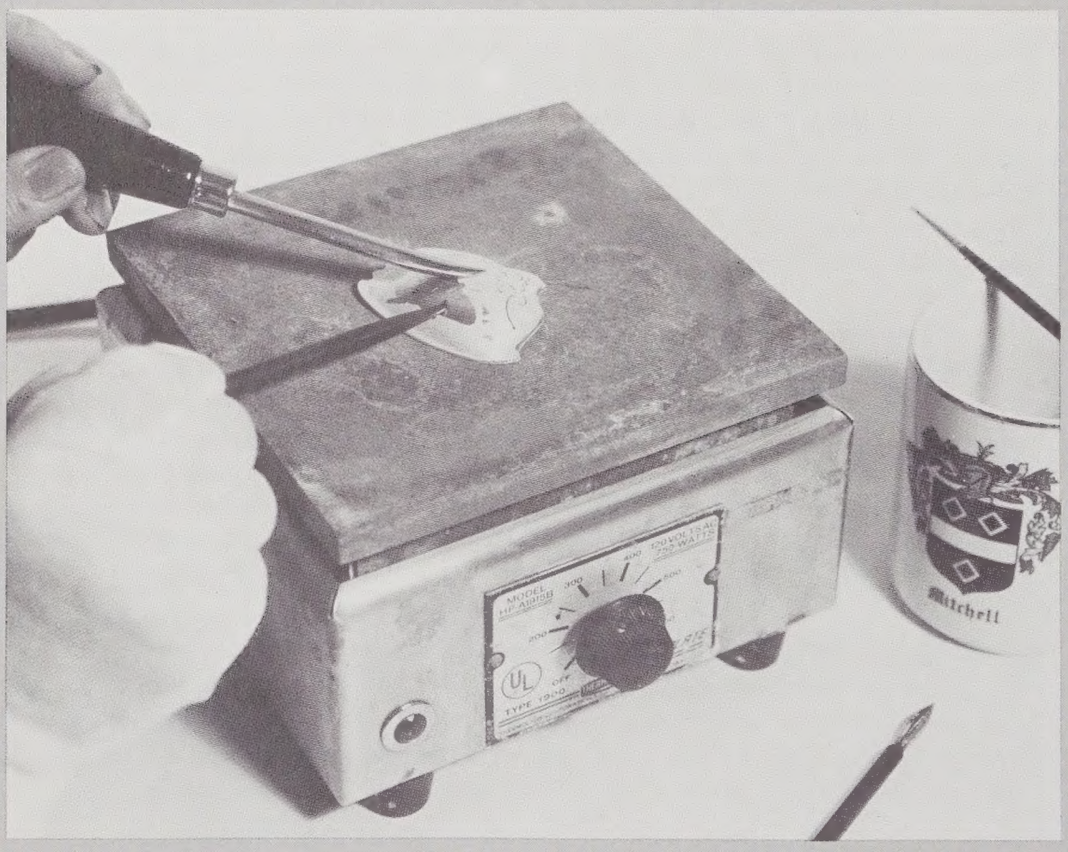
Equipment and Materials

- Hotplate, camp stove, torch, electric or gas stove
- Gum tragacanth powder
- #00 or #1 artist's paintbrush
- 24K gold foil .03 – .05 mm
  If Thompson's gold foil is used, double or quadruple layers are used as a single sheet.
- Tracing paper
- Sharp scissors or X-Acto® knife
- Several shapes of curved steel burnishers
- Fine-pointed tweezers
- Cotton gloves
  (not gardening gloves – too bulky)
- Hot pickle (Sparex®)
- Fine-pointed sewing needle

Optional

- Optivisor®
- Tripod (for large pieces)
- Hole punches or design punches to cut out repeated shapes
- Steel or brass scratchbrush

When burnishing the gold overlay, it is important to hold the object steady, which may require the use of a second burnisher or tweezers. Keep a container of water handy for cooling the burnishers.



Preparation of the 24K Gold Foil

Purchase 24K gold in the thinnest form possible. The desired thickness is .03 to .05 mm, which can be achieved in a rolling mill if necessary. An electric rolling mill is preferable, but a manual mill will work. Cut two pieces of copper or brass a little wider than the size of the gold sheet and considerably longer. Heat these to build up an oxide layer and allow them to air cool without pickling. The purpose is to create a scaly surface that will not adhere to the gold foil. Set the gold between these sheets and pass it through the mill in the conventional way.

After every two or three passes, the gold will need to be annealed. This is most easily done on a hotplate set on *High*. Use a sheet of 20-gauge copper, brass or steel to diffuse the heat. Work in subdued lighting and heat until the gold begins to show red, then air cool for a few moments and quench in water.

Note that if Thompson's gold foil is used, limit the number of pieces in an application to five or six. Because the foil is so thin, the prolonged heat needed for more complex applications is liable to diffuse the gold into the silver alloy, where it will almost disappear.

Process

1 Complete the work through all soldering and finishing steps. Patination, stone setting and cold connections can all be achieved after Kum-Boo. Any other procedure should be completed before the overlay process is begun.

2 Draw the pattern onto tracing paper. Fold this to create a sleeve into which the gold foil can be placed. Cut the overlay piece(s) with a knife or sharp scissors. Leave the gold in the paper until ready for use.

3 Using a permanent marker, draw the overlay outline onto the work, making the drawing a little larger than the overlay piece. This outline will ensure the proper location of the overlay.

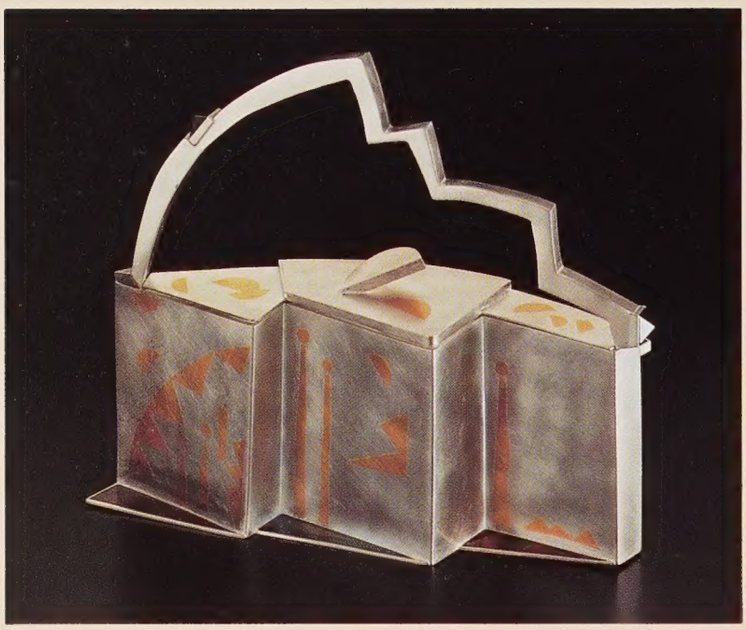
4 Place the gold pieces on the work with a dampened brush or burnisher. Simply dip the brush in a dish of water and shake off all excess before using the brush to pick up the gold pattern. If the patterns are large or complicated, use a very thin mixture of gum tragacanth instead of water. I prefer to mix my own solution starting from powder rather than use a premixed commercial liquid solution.

5 Set the work on an unheated hotplate or burner and set the temperature on *High*. In order to provide a flat surface, you may want to set a piece of steel or metal screen on the burner and allow this to distribute the heat. As it dries, the water or gum tragacanth will secure the foil to the surface. When the object reaches 500°–700°F (260°–370°C), apply light pressure with a burnisher to tack the foil into place.

6 When each section of the overlay is tacked down, lower the heat and burnish the entire piece briskly. It is important that the object be held steady, which might require an additional burnisher or a pair of tweezers. Note that you are working directly on the hot burner, which is why gloves must be worn.

7 If the burnisher gets too hot, the gold foil will adhere to it. To prevent this, keep a cup of cold water close at hand and dip the burnisher into it periodically as you work.

8 When the application is finished, examine the edges of the overlay closely to see that they are well attached. A loupe or Optivisor is useful for this process. If the diffusion is complete, set the work in hot pickle until the metal is completely white and all burnishing marks are removed. The piece can now be patined or polished, using a rouge cloth or a scratchbrush lubricated with soapy water.



Moonlight Promenade
Box container
925 silver, 24K gold, titanium
and hematite
9¼ x 10½ x 3⅛", 1987

Story Hour
Three containers
925 silver,
24K gold and red jasper
3½ x 3 x 4", 1987

Wedding Ceremonial Set
Wine set with tray
925 silver, 14K,
24K gold and hematite
7 x 6⅛ x 4",
1½ x 2 x 3",
¾ x 11⅞ x 6⅛", 1987

Variations

A It is possible to overlap layers of foil using the Kum-Boo techniques described above. The gold is so thin it is semi-transparent, which will effect a color change as layers are built up. When working on a flat or nearly flat object, it's most efficient to apply pieces directly onto the object while it's hot. To do this, pick up the prepared piece of foil with a dampened burnisher and carefully set it into position. Keep a slight pressure on the piece until the water stops sizzling, then gently begin to burnish the foil down. When it appears to be tacked into place, increase the pressure and speed of the burnishing action. Remember to quench the burnisher in water when it heats up, and to change burnishers when a new shape is required.

B Sometimes complicated patterns or unusual contours of the object make the positioning of the overlay pieces difficult. In these circumstances, use a thin mixture of water and gum tragacanth to glue the pieces into place. Use a fine paintbrush to coat the area that will receive the foil and to pick up the overlay piece. When all the pieces are in position, set the work aside to dry completely.

When dry, set the object on the hotplate, turn the heat to *High*, and selectively burnish areas of each piece to tack down a couple of spots on each pattern piece. Turn the temperature to *Medium* and burnish each piece fully. Remember to cool the burnisher periodically. When burnishing is complete, allow the piece to cool, then examine each edge for bonding. If the diffusion was complete, set the object in hot pickle.

C For a large object the hotplate might not provide sufficient heat. Diffusion will not occur if the parent metal is not hot enough. In this case glue the overlay pieces with the gum tragacanth mixture as described in *B* (above). A torch can be used in conjunction with the hotplate. Obviously this process will be easier if you can enlist the aid of a friend.

Repair of Kum-Boo

Poor adhesion is usually indicated by tiny bubbles in the gold. To repair, reheat the area with a soft torch flame, then, turning the flame aside briefly, reburnish with considerable pressure. If there are many bubbles present, puncture each one with a fine needle, reheat the area and burnish quickly and vigorously.

The preceding article is extracted from
Metals Technic, a book of collected technical articles
to be published soon by Brynmorgen Press.

Komelia Okim is a professor of art and head
of the metals program at Montgomery College,
Rockville, MD.

Portrait of Henry Steig
from catalog cover, c. 1957

Henry Steig

Jazz Man, Writer, Jeweler

by Catherine Siracusa and Sidney Levitt

Everyone knows the famous picture from the film *The Seven Year Itch*, of Marilyn Monroe standing on a New York sidewalk, her skirt blown up by an updraft from the subway grate below. However, not everyone knows that at that moment she was standing in front of Henry Steig's jewelry shop at 590 Lexington Avenue.

Henry Steig was a man of many talents. Before he became a jeweler, he was a jazz musician, painter, sculptor, commercial artist, cartoonist, photographer, short story writer and novelist.

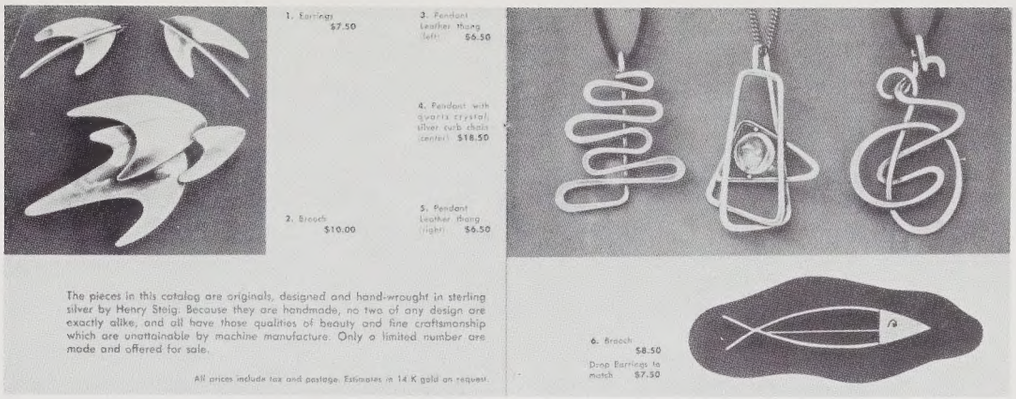
"Henry was a Renaissance man," says *New Yorker* cartoonist Mischa Richter, who was Steig's good friend and Provincetown neighbor.

Henry Anton Steig was born on February 19, 1906, in New York City. His parents, Joseph and Laura, had come to America at the turn of the century, from Lvov (called Lemberg in German), which was then in the Polish part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Joseph was a house-painter and Laura, a seamstress.

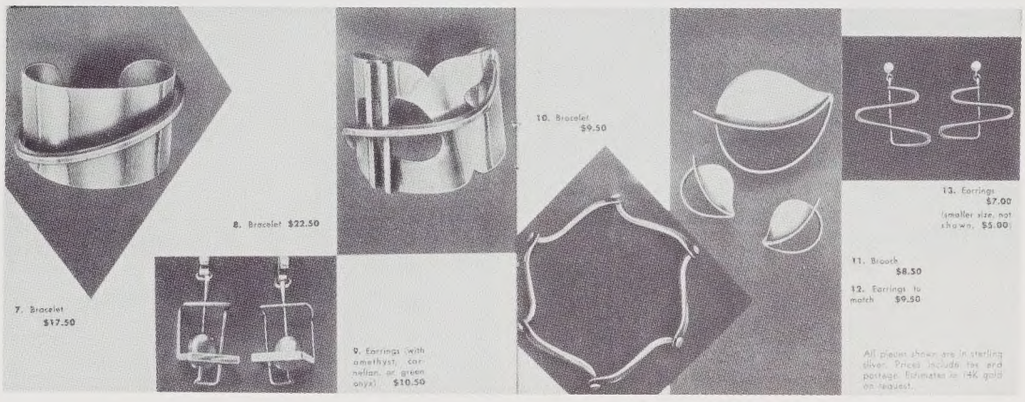
They had four sons, Irwin, Henry, William and Arthur, all of them versatile, talented and artistic. William Steig is the well-known *New Yorker* cartoonist and author-illustrator of children's books. Irwin was a writer of short stories for the *New Yorker*. Arthur was a painter and poet whose poems were published in *The New Republic* and *Poetry* magazines.

William Steig recalls, "My father and mother both began painting and became exhibiting artists after their sons grew up." In the May 14, 1945, issue of *Newsweek* magazine, an article was published about an exhibition, "possibly the first one-family show on Art Row (57th Street)" at the New Art Circle Gallery. It was called "The Eight Performing Steigs, Artists All." Included were paintings by Joseph and Laura Steig; drawings and sculpture by William and paintings by his wife, Liza; paintings by Arthur and his wife, Aurora; and photographs by Henry and paintings by his wife, Mimi. The only brother not included was Irwin, "the only non-conformist Steig," who was working at that time as advertising manager of a Connecticut soap manufacturer.

Jewelry photographed
by Jan Frank, New York


1. Earrings $7.50
3. Pendant Leather thong (left) $6.50
4. Pendant with quartz crystal, silver curb chain (center) $18.50
2. Brooch $10.00
5. Pendant Leather thong (right) $6.50
The pieces in this catalog are originals, designed and hand-wrought in sterling silver by Henry Steig. Because they are handmade, no two of any design are exactly alike, and all have those qualities of beauty and fine craftsmanship which are unattainable by machine manufacture. Only a limited number are made and offered for sale.
All prices include tax and postage. Estimates in 14 K gold on request.
6. Brooch $8.50
Drop Earrings to match $7.50

The first four pages of Henry Steig's catalog from the late 1950s. Courtesy Michael Steig


8. Bracelet $22.50
7. Bracelet $17.50
9. Earrings (with amethyst, carnelian, or green onyx) $10.50
10. Bracelet $9.50
13. Earrings $7.00
(smaller size, not shown, $5.00)
11. Brooch $8.50
12. Earrings to match $9.50
All pieces shown are in sterling silver. Prices include tax and postage. Estimates in 14K gold on request.

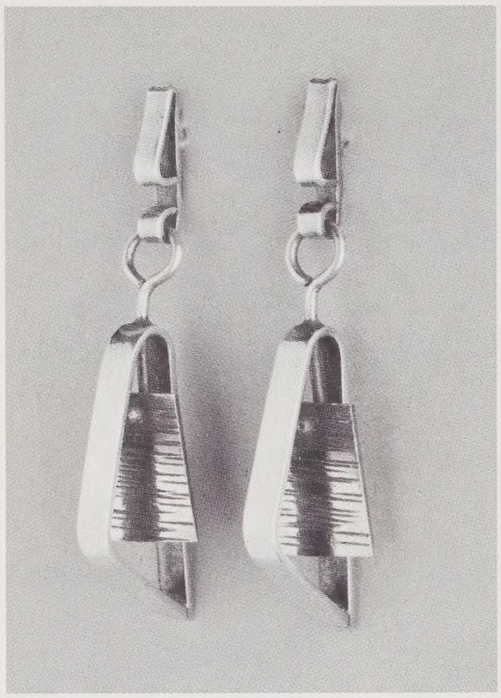
In the article "the brothers attribute the family's abundance of good artists to the fact that 'we all like each other's work...get excited about it. Whenever anyone starts they get lots of encouragement.' Joseph Steig adds, 'Painting is a contagious thing. If you lived in our environment, you would probably paint.'"

Henry Steig grew up in this extraordinary environment. The family lived in the Bronx. After graduating from high school, Henry Steig went to City College (CCNY). After three years he left to study painting and sculpture at the National Academy of Design. He was also an accomplished musician, playing saxophone, violin and classical guitar, and while he was in college, he began working as a jazz musician. From about 1922, when only sixteen years old, until 1932 he played reed instruments with local dance bands.

After four years at the National Academy, Steig worked as a commercial artist and cartoonist. He signed his cartoons "Henry Anton" because his brother William was working as a cartoonist at the same time, for many of the same magazines. From about 1932 to 1936, Henry Anton cartoons appeared in *Life*, *Judge*, *New Yorker* and other magazines.

Steig began a writing career in 1935 that lasted until about 1947. He became very successful and well known as a short story writer, with stories appearing regularly in *Saturday Evening Post*, *New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Colliers* and others. They were often humorous tales about jazz and the jazz musicians who populated the world of music in the roaring twenties. Other stories were about his Bronx childhood. He also wrote nonfiction magazine pieces, including a *New Yorker* profile of Benny Goodman and jazz criticism. Several of his nonfiction articles were illustrated by William Steig.

In 1941, Alfred A. Knopf published Henry Steig's novel, *Send Me Down*. The story, told with absolute realism, is about two brothers who become jazz musicians in the twenties. On the book jacket, Steig wrote, "Much of the material for *Send Me Down* was gathered during my years as a jazz musician playing with local jazz bands and with itinerant groups in vaudeville and on dance hall tour engagements. Although I was only second-rate as a musician, I know my subject from the inside, and I believe I was the first to write stories about jazz musicians, based on actual personal experience." His son, Michael, recalls that there was some interest in making a movie of the book. "My father told me that John Garfield wanted to play the lead character."



Earrings
sterling silver, ½ x 2¼"
Courtesy Fifty/50 Gallery, New York

Pendant
sterling silver with leather thong
1¾ x 2 1/16"

Earrings
sterling silver, 1⅛ x 1⅜"
Collection of Janet Drucker

Steig did go to Hollywood in 1941, under contract to write screenplays. He was going to work with Johnny Mercer, the songwriter. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, he returned to New York. "He undoubtedly would have returned anyway," says Michael Steig. "He was not happy with the contract his agent had negotiated for him." Mischa Richter adds, "Henry was very unimpressed with Hollywood."

In the early 1940s, Arthur Steig started a company called Steig Products. "In making artist's colors and inks," says William Steig, "Arthur solved problems that professional chemists were unable to solve."

Henry Steig was a partner with his brother in Steig Products from about 1945 to 1948. "Because the business (which later became quite thriving and still exists today) did not make enough money for both partners, my father stepped out," says Michael Steig. "How he hit on jewelry making, specifically, I don't know, but he had to consider how he might put his creative talents to work in order to make a living."

"I don't know how Henry got into jewelry making," says William Steig. "Henry was into *many* things. Even as a kid, when most of us were into sports, Henry was always making things: kites, rings made of horse hair (pulled from horses' tails) and such."

By the late 1940s there were several talented craftsmen who had already established shops in Greenwich Village. Among them were the studio jewelers Sam Kramer and Paul Lobel. Like Paul Lobel, Henry Steig came to jewelry making as a mature and accomplished artist. Throughout his life, in addition to designing and making jewelry, Steig continued to paint and take photographs and to exhibit his work in galleries.

"The only modern jeweler that I can recall my father knowing personally at that time was Sam Kramer, and I'm sure there was little, if any, influence," says Michael Steig. "He did admire the jewelry of Yonny Segal, who had an exhibition of her work at the Museum of Natural History in the early nineteen fifties.

"Although my father did take one or two evening courses in jewelry making, this was not over any substantial time period. He learned the fundamentals and went on from there, on his own, so one could say he was largely self-taught.

"The first actual exhibition and sale of his work was in 1949 or 1950 at our apartment on West Ninth Street. In the summer of 1950, he rented a store at 200 Commercial Street in Provincetown, Massachusetts, which he continued to operate in summers until 1972."

Flexible twisted wire bracelet
sterling silver, 2 x 7½"
Collection of the authors

Although he lived in Greenwich Village, Steig opened his first shop in midtown Manhattan in late 1949 or early 1950, at 51st Street and First Avenue.

Michael Steig remembers, "My father moved to 590 Lexington Avenue at 52nd Street a few years later, perhaps 1955, although I'm not certain.

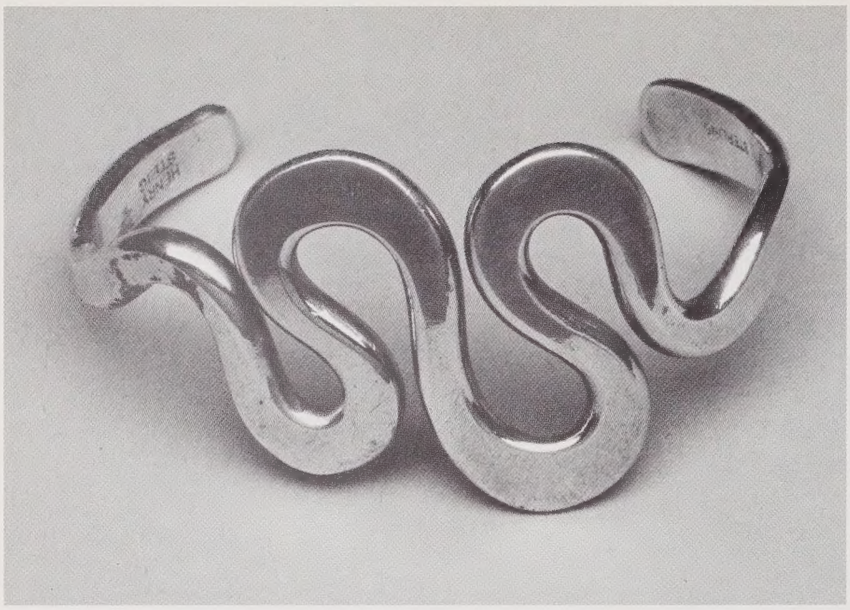
"He *never* had a shop on West Fourth Street (where many of the New York studio jewelers were located), although Milton Hefling's store there, which mainly sold handmade leather handbags, did carry some of his pieces for a while in the nineteen fifties."

During the fifties, Steig worked primarily in handwrought sterling silver, although he did offer his designs in 14K gold. There is no typical Steig piece. He made jewelry constructed of flat forms combining geometric and biomorphic shapes. He also made pieces of twisted wire. His jewelry was mostly abstract, but sometimes his pieces were representational, drawing on plant or animal forms for inspiration.

A catalog from the late fifties illustrates dozens of his designs. For example, there is a brooch and earring set made of sleek boomerang shapes. There are several bracelets that show his talent for combining ordered geometric forms with more improvisational organic shapes. All of his pieces are very sculptural. His sophisticated use of negative and positive space, his preference for the asymmetrical, and his ability to create tantalizing visual surprises demonstrate his highly developed sculptural sensibilities.

"Each piece of Henry's jewelry was a miniature sculpture," says Mischa Richter. "He was very jealous about his designs."

In Steig's twisted wire pieces, the wire has been hammered so that its surface modulates from round to flat. It was then shaped into complex curvilinear forms. In most of these pieces it is hard to visually follow the path of the wire from its beginning to its end. Reminiscent of the jewelry of Alexander Calder in the use of twisted and flattened wire, these pieces differ from Calder's in that they are more labyrinthine and lyrical. One piece in particular (see photo above) is a large bracelet of rhythmically looped wire that is light, unexpectedly flexible and remarkably comfortable to wear.



Bracelet
sterling silver, 1 1/16 x 8"
Courtesy Fifty/50 Gallery, New York

Ring
sterling silver with opal
table, 5/8 x 1"
Courtesy Fifty/50 Gallery, New York

Steig occasionally used semiprecious stones in his jewelry, not as a centerpiece or dominant element, but to accent and contrast with the total design. Amethyst, carnelian, quartz crystal, green onyx, malachite and turquoise were among the cabochon stones that he used, as well as cultured pearls and hand-carved ebony. Michael Steig remembers that his father always bought unusual and unique stones from itinerant salesmen and would design a piece around a particular stone. Because he used odd stones, he often made only one or two pieces in a particular design.

The jewelry of Henry Steig is elegant, visually light and flattering to the wearer. He took pains to make sure that the jewelry fit comfortably and was never overpowering. His sense of design was strong, but not formalistic and rigid. He knew that an overly designed piece of jewelry is boring and predictable. There is a sense of freedom, improvisation and surprise in his work but no piece was ever haphazard or sloppy.

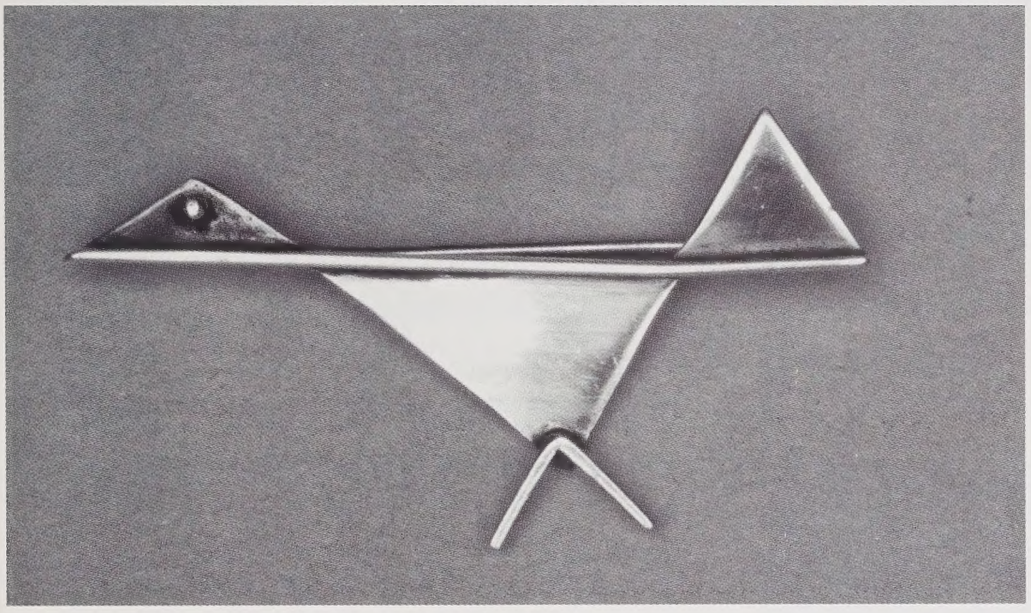
Sylvia Roth, wife of *New Yorker* cartoonist Al Ross, bought a necklace from Steig in the 1950s, a one-of-a kind piece made of silver, malachite and ebony. While she was in the shop with her husband and young son, Steig remarked on the fact that she wasn't wearing a wedding ring. She explained that her wedding ring had always been uncomfortable to wear. "It's just psychological," said Steig, and he proceeded to sell her a wedding ring that went with the necklace. She wears the ring to this day and considers the necklace her most unusual and striking piece of jewelry.

Many people in the arts came to Henry Steig's shops. Michael Steig remembers that Ella Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Taylor were among the celebrities who purchased Steig jewelry. He also remembers seeing Edward G. Robinson in the Provincetown shop.

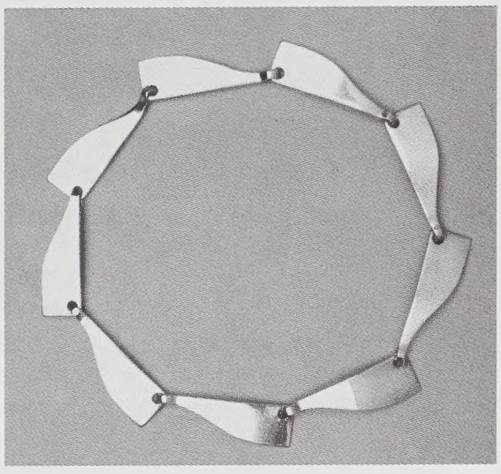
In 1963, Steig closed his shop on Lexington Avenue. He and his wife moved permanently to Provincetown. He ran the shop at 200 Commercial Street for nine more years.

"My father's work continued to develop in the nineteen sixties," says Michael Steig. "By this time he was working almost exclusively in 14-karat gold. For the first time he began to have cast pieces made, a process he had resisted up to that time because he had been reluctant to relinquish complete control over the construction of each piece. He did find a company to cast his pieces that he felt he could trust. He was pleased with the results and continued to explore the possibilities of casting. He also made some very delicate pieces out of square gold wire at this time."

Pin
sterling silver, 1⅛ x 2⅛16"
Collection of the authors



Collar
sterling silver, ½ x 14¼"
Collection of the authors



In Provincetown, Steig pursued his many interests. "In the sixties, my father became most active as a painter of abstract and semiabstract oils. His work was exhibited at the Provincetown Art Association and the Provincetown Group Gallery," says Michael Steig. "One of his best paintings was done in 1972, when he was already suffering the symptoms of what turned out to be spinal cancer. It was based on a slide he took of Beachy Head, in Sussex, when he and my mother visited during my research year in England."

Henry Steig was a member of a group of recorder players. He was also an avid chess player. Mischa Richter recalls that when Steig became interested in astronomy, not only did he build his own telescope, he also ground the glass for the lens.

In 1970, Steig wrote a manuscript on jewelry making called "The New Jewelry Handbook." It was never published because he and the publisher could not agree on the content. "They were not pleased because it did not cover elementary essentials, which was not his intention," says his son.

Henry Steig sold the use of his Provincetown shop and his designs to Chicago jeweler Jan Dee in 1972.

On February 2, 1973, he died of spinal cancer in Hyannis, Massachusetts.

Of all the careers that Henry Steig successfully pursued in his lifetime, his career as a jeweler was the one he remained at the longest. He leaves behind the legacy of his modern jewelry, a focus for the artistic energies of an exceptional and multitalented man.

Catherine Siracusa and Sidney Levitt write and illustrate children's books. They live in New York and collect jewelry of the '40s and '50s.

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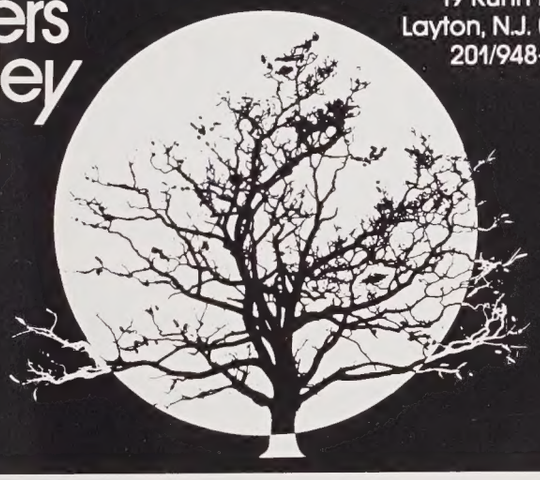

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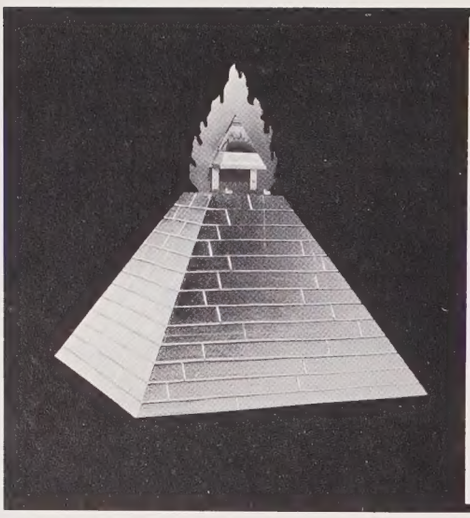

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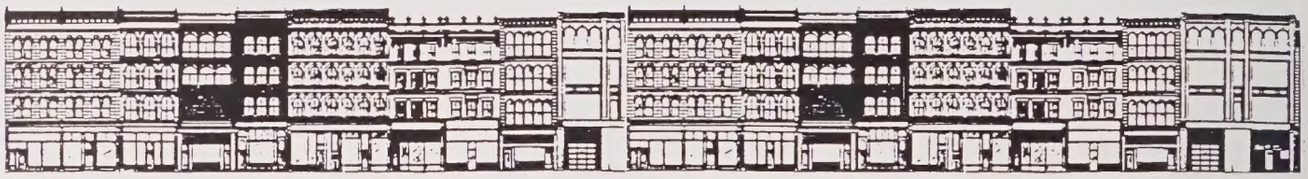

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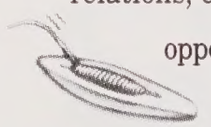

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Letters continued

Dear Editor:

As a presenter at the SNAG '91 Atlanta Conference, I joined a long list of metalsmiths who, by public platform exposure, fall victim to the pen of review. Reviewer Keith Lewis (*Metalsmith*, Fall 91) stated that my lecture was "a rambling presentation of my drawing and designs rather than an overview or study of the jewelry of contemporary West Africa." Such an assertion by Mr. Lewis is ridiculous. It is patently obvious that the reviewer either did not attend two thirds of my presentation or sorely missed its major content. Because the time of my lecture/presentation coincided with that of Tiffany vice president Tom Ross, I can only assume that the conference reviewer, charged with the sometimes grueling task of singular conference coverage, attempted to cover both my presentation and that of Mr. Ross, resulting in a disservice to us both. Or surely Mr. Lewis came late to my lecture.

Often conference planners cannot escape the temptation of contriving intriguing titles in order to meet the challenge of a successful confluence. In this instance the perhaps enticing title "Contemporary West African Jewelry" attracted an audience and reviewer expecting a canvass of a subject impossible to meaningfully overview in a mere hour's time.

In the opening of my discourse it was made patently clear the exact title was "Contemporary West African Jewelry – Part I: THE SAHEL /Bamako Mali." It was further stated that the presentation was carefully planned and divided into three parts: (1) a look into a typical Bamako jewelry vitrine, (2) a look at some of my work rooted in that tradition, and (3) a look at my design work of traditional/authentic jewelry of the specific area which I am currently revitalizing.

I am, to my knowledge, the only foreigner to have thus far earned an official diploma in jewelry making from the Malian National Institute of (African) Arts. I would not belittle myself nor insult fellow members in the metalsmithing community by false representations. My drawings and designs presented at the conference, with very few exceptions, are of authentic African origin and esthetic. I challenge anyone, africanist or not, to refute the authenticity of 95 percent of the drawings or work presented in my lecture. The matter in question represents but a small portion of real African design yet to be spirited out by researchers and/or practitioners of African jewelry/metalsmithing culture/art.

I am one actually trained in Africa and continue to live and create from the Afrocentric community with due credentials, hard sweat, tears and living experience. It has been said that I make a fine art of African bush design. Well, the art and fineness of the thing were already here long before my arrival. Unfortunately, many persons are not ready to accept a "contemporary" African design/art concept with respect to African jewelry and adornment. Most of those in the West are guilty of condemning African art to a nebulous past tense, notwithstanding that "the vast majority of African artworks in our national museums were probably made within the period of modern European, mostly colonial contact" (John Picton, *African Arts*, July 91, page 85).

It is sad indeed that most Western critics of African art are misguided by the conditioning of modern prejudices which preclude any knowledgeable comprehension of the complex variety of Afrocentric design and a refusal to honestly consider the creative dimensions of African intelligence. Many Westerners are further guilty of presuming themselves exclusive purveyors of what is truly African. That Elvis Presley sang the song "Hound Dog" does not avoid that the song was of African-American origin. Likewise, that my designs and jewelry in question came from my studio and drafting board does in no way preclude their African authenticity. A person does not have to be a German citizen to truthfully play the music of Bach, Beethoven or Mozart.

So, Mr. Lewis, do not let the fineness of my hi-tech graphic design instruments or studio/atelier tooling or process mislead you as to the authenticity of the jewelry or designs I presented at the 1991 SNAG Atlanta Conference.

Dr. Duke Williams, Conakry, Guinea

Lynne E. Hull continued

Work Influences

The most apparent influence on the form of Hull's vessels is from Eastern cultures. She recalls that even as a child she loved the Chinese ceramic vase given to her father after World War II. Her father was an Air Force pilot who served in China, and perhaps the familiar and comfortable stories from those "good old days" were made concrete in this special gift. It was tall, teardrop round with its low belly heavy and thick. There seems to be a presence of that form in all of Hull's "pots" today.

The spiritual connection with this Chinese pot led her to research Chinese form and detail, and she found affinity with the ceramic ware of the T'ang Dynasty of the late 7th and early 8th century A.D. Its forms and surface designs were minimal, not at all like the popular bold and punchy Chinese bronzes of other periods.

Hull traces Japanese influence on her work to several sources. First, she was attracted to Japanese design and style where "their clear and simple design format has always drawn [her] to their work." An interest in the tea ceremony eventually instilled in her the importance of the vessel as a symbolic object. Just as the invention of the vessel made basic nourishment easier, these vessels help nourish the spirit by brightening an individual's space.[5]

Hull is admittedly very sensitive to and influenced by her environment. The Pacific Northwest is an American gateway to the Pacific Rim cultures. Many of the public and private buildings there reflect this influence. They have developed a community of gateways and decorative portals that more symbolically than physically divide public space from private. This symbolic understanding is also a common cultural practice of the Native American peoples. Hull's vessels meet the viewer with decorative and gestural handles that function at this level of greeting.

Out of a wide variety of rich patinas, Hull's green patinas are of a special origin. Unlike the popular verdigris patina so often used today, Hull's blotchy green surface treatment is not reminiscent of an ancient object, but of a memory; it is a reminder of the great mosses of the Northwest's woods. Hull grew up riding horses, in a less populated time in Bellevue, Washington. She recalls the woods and the freshness of its air as she rode along seeing the thick, beautiful greens of the mosses everywhere, the telltale sign of an old, little-touched woods. The woods she rode through, as well as the ball field she played in, have since grown into malls, housing developments and businesses. It seems that every time she chooses to spray on a green patina, she is preserving the forests and refreshing her memories.

> The artist and craftsman, however far he may be from an ultimate liberation, is continually willing his work. He devotes his life to acts which are a personal commitment to value. He is, to varying degrees, an example of a practicing initiative. A creative person. Initiating, enacting. Out of personal being. Using his lifetime to find his original face, to awaken his own voice, beyond all learning, habit, thought; to tap life at its source.[6]

William Baran-Mickle is a metalsmith and writer living near Rochester, NY.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[6] Richards, Mary Caroline, *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person*, Wesleyan University Press, 1969, p. 43.

Books

Victorian Jewelry: Unexplored Treasures
by Ginny Redington Dawes and Corinne Davidov
Photography by Tom Dawes
New York, Abbeville Press, 1991
Clothbound, $40.00

This beautifully photographed book focuses not on the overtly ornate splendors associated with the period but with what is called "secondary" jewelry. Produced to satisfy the great demand for inexpensive adornment that arose during Queen Victoria's long reign, secondary jewelry was made from nonprecious materials such as stone, coal, hair, steel, papier-mâché, and aluminum.

The book is quite small, with very little text. Of seven chapters, only four deal with the actual types of jewelry and their materials. Scattered through the four chapters, "Silver," "Stone," "Steel," and "Sentiment," there are, however, some valuable historical tidbits about the materials and processes that were used to create secondary jewelry.

The chapter on silver provides some interesting insights into the use of the metal. During the Industrial Revolution, the air was heavily polluted with sulfur dioxide, and many craftsmen rejected silver for its tarnishability. As a result, the majority of Victorian silver jewelry was made only in the last two decades of the century. The chapter concludes with a brief description of niello, a process in which a fusion of silver, copper, lead and sulfur was melted and poured into designs incised on low-grade silver. Many of the pieces illustrated in the color photographs reflect a remarkable modernity in design.

The most informative chapter is the one on steel. Jewelry made of unusual metals such as steel, iron, gunmetal and aluminum was in vogue from the eighteenth century up to the mid-nineteenth century. Cut steel and Berlin iron had a somewhat historical significance in both France and Germany: dating from 1759 wealthy people in France were asked to donate their jewels to the treasury and began wearing cut steel instead. The fashion swept the continent, and cut steel became big business by the late eighteenth century.

In the mid-1800s aluminum jewelry made a brief but unforgettable appearance. Jewelers were fascinated by the lightness of the metal and the fact that it did not oxidize as silver did. Much of the aluminum jewelry from the period was combined with high-karat gold. It was so prized that both Queen Victoria and Empress Marie Louise owned suites of aluminum and gold jewelry. The chapter ends with a small section on gunmetal. Originally made of bronze and then of an alloy of copper and tin, by the end of the nineteenth century gunmetal was often made of iron, and the term was applied to any metal with that distinctive mat black color and smooth, silky finish.

The chapter on the stone jewelry popular in the mid-1800s provides a broad range of visual material on various types of jewelry also known as Scottish agate or Scottish pebble. The remaining chapter on "Sentiment" is a catch-all for the materials that could not easily be accommodated in the other three. It surveys the jewelry of mourning and half-mourning and includes sections on jet and its imitations (French jet, gutta-percha and bog oak) and on tortoiseshell and tortoiseshell pique.

Victorian Jewelry is not a historical or technical tome, nor is it meant to be. The authors are avid, knowledgeable collectors, not historians. The book's strength lies in the superb four-color pictures that provide a visual time line of jewelry styles, many of which are as wearable today as they were a century ago.

– Dorothy Spencer

Professional Goldsmithing
A Contemporary Guide to Traditional Jewelry Techniques
by Alan Revere, Founder: Revere Academy of Jewelry Arts
New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991
Clothbound, $59.95

The books that we place in our libraries serve a number of purposes, from documenting the history of jewelry, its objects and its various roles in diverse cultures, to serving as references for information on materials and technology. The former often contain beautiful photographs which represent the finest examples of a given object. The reference book, by definition, is filled with information and is usually organized by material and process.

A third and less common format would be the tutorial. *Professional Goldsmithing* is a very handsome book, beautifully designed and laid out, presented as a graduated course of study. The over 400 color photographs, many of which are macro 1:1 scale, are exceptionally sharp and informative. The text is organized in three sections: "Getting Started," "Basic Projects" and "Further Projects." It includes a fine set of appendices, glossary and thorough index.

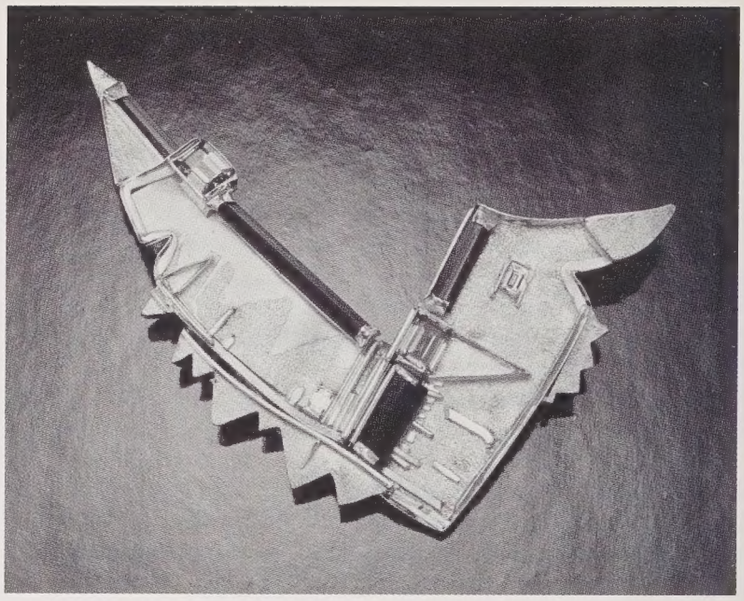
"Getting Started" is somewhat of a well-designed crash course. In the first 48 pages of the book, the foundation is laid to allow the reader to approach the projects with an understanding of precious metals, procedures, tools, alloying and working with platinum. The text jumps from point to point in this section in an effort to quickly cover a lot of ground. Safe practices and health hazards are frequently mentioned throughout the book.

Thirty projects serve as lessons to be followed in the creation of a series of progressively more sophisticated jewelry and mechanisms. Many of the objects are generic, with good reason, as they are intended to emphasize the working skills rather than a discussion of design concepts. Each project is succinctly presented in step-by-step fashion, almost all steps being accompanied by an exemplary photograph. Projects range from the most basic forged bangle bracelet to more complex linkages and a cluster ring. All are initially presented to inform the reader/student of the new skills to be exercised through the making of the object. These introductory statements are an outstanding feature of the book in their ability to present the significance of both the procedure and the resultant object or mechanism.

Alan Revere has succeeded in his desire to document the classical goldsmithing course of study and to create a book which encourages its reader to learn the material through experience. Although it is filled with useful information, I would not recommend this as a reference book but rather as a bedside reader. *Professional Goldsmithing* is a book to be read, as I have done for the past few nights, then referred back to. Of course it is first intended as a course of study and would elicit greater participation as a series of lessons at the bench. While it might not be my recommendation as a first book on jewelry, it would be a valuable addition to the library of anyone in the field. Two gold thumbs up.

– Matthew Hollern

Reviews



Judith Kaufman

Susan Cummins Gallery
Mill Valley, California
September 3 – 29, 1991

by Charlene M. Modena

Brooch, pink and green tourmaline crystals, diamonds, 22K gold, 3½ x 2½", 1991

LEFT

Brooch, amethysts, moonstone, tourmaline crystals, pearls, green and yellow 18K and 22K gold, 5½ x 3 x ½", 1991

At first glance, the words "lush" and "baroque" would seem the appropriate descriptive terminology for Judith Kaufman's jewelry. Although there are the restless opposites and the typical blend of color, light and movement found in the purest of the baroque, a closer look at these breathtaking and daring pieces brings one to an entirely new vantage point.

Sensitively integrating historical and futuristic themes with vivacity and beauty, Judith Kaufman's jewelry becomes, in a sense, intergalactic. Collaging finely detailed cutouts reminiscent of glyphs, cuneiforms and fragments of star charts with brightly colored gems and ancient glass fragments, she shows us how to travel not only between planetary galaxies but between galaxies of time as well. This intergalactic framework, combined with the artist's ingenuous delight in materials and color, creates the fabric for a voyage of enchantment and eloquence.

The one-of-a-kind pieces utilizing precious and semiprecious stones, Roman glass and high-karat gold yield the glowing surfaces of the alchemist's crucible. They also speak of spontaneity in the creative process. Judith Kaufman states, "When I sit at my bench and begin, I have absolutely no idea what the piece will look like until it's finished, making the process both frightening and exhilarating."

This combination of creative playfulness and focus moves beyond simply looking at and seeing a palette of "thousands and thousands of stones on my workbench" in an assemblage with gold and silver. It is, rather, the outcome of vision, the vision that early Surrealists recognized as an alchemical blend allowing materials and images to work with and through the artist. Judith Kaufman states that in a world of planned and overplanned technicality and computerized precision she has chosen to "hold on even tighter to my trust in spontaneity and serendipity."

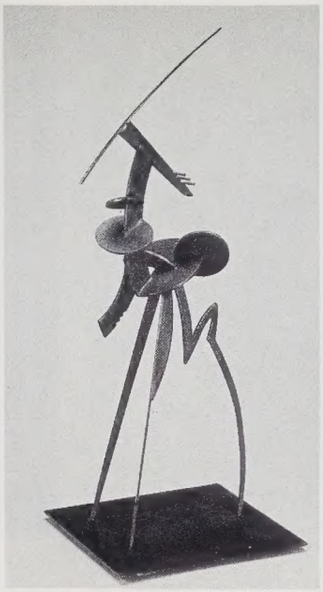
Although there exists this parallel in process with the early Surrealists and many other artists who have forsaken preplanning for the spontaneous, Kaufman credits the painted and gilded surfaces of Gustav Klimt, himself from a family of goldsmiths, as a major influence in the luminous, "puzzle-like" collaging seen in her work.

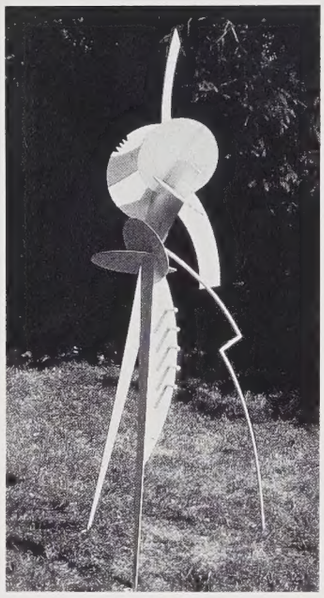
A brooch of pink and green tourmaline crystals, diamond baguettes and 22K yellow gold exhibits a playful inquiry into rich textures and colors. Geometry and movement are combined with gemstones and high-karat gold to create a small universe which in one moment appears as a mysterious topography, and at another as a small, wondrous ship sailing through space. Another pin, delicately articulated and densely rich with amethysts, moonstones, tourmaline crystals and pearls with green and yellow 18K and 22K gold, dances through time as both an Aztec headdress and a celestial scepter.

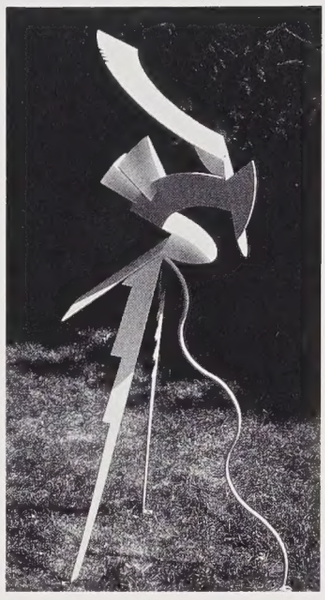
Judith Kaufman is self-taught and committed to the intuitive and unorthodox. Her steadfast belief in her own process and work has served her well. She has created a world of wonder and beauty for all of us to share.

Charlene Modena teaches jewelry and sculpture at the Academy of Art College in San Francisco.

LEFT TO RIGHT
Makimba
rusted steel, 2′6″ h., 1991
Nomandi
painted steel, 6′ h., 1991
Tohani
painted steel, 5′6″ h., 1991







John Nihart

Dawson Gallery
Rochester, New York
September 6 – October 8, 1991

by William Baran-Mickle

The recent exhibition of sculpture in steel by John Nihart represented a suite of constructions mostly completed over a relatively brief period, the summer of 1991. This makes the presentation fresh and insightful of a place in time and of a consistent process and dialog between the artist and his creations.

There were two small sculptures set among six large freestanding sculptures. The smaller works tended to look like scale models due to their presence among overpowering relatives. What they gained for their size was a strong, intense energy that emanated from their fabricated character, with heftier edges and more squat characteristics. What they lacked, by comparison as well, was the spaciousness and solemnness of expression gained from the greater scale and sense of space of the large works.

Makimba, for example, was the most animated and active form in the show. Like several of the larger works, it has an unmistakable animal or insect-like character. *Makimba* looks as if it is backing away quite suddenly. The larger works, such as *Bird Totem*, standing 6½ feet, are stilled, as if their motion simply stopped. *Makimba* plays to the viewer's own size. Perceiving ourselves as larger and more powerful, we are in control of the imagined object, imagined situation and therefore easily play with the sculpture without fear.

Nihart builds a sculptural language with forms, shapes and gestures that include an array of circle/discs which are used full, quartered and halved and then curved, folded, spliced and cut. All of these pieces are joined in a remarkably successful succession of points. They are fabricated in a continuous, interactive style and mounted on tripod bases. These joins effortlessly begin and end; they fade into other such floating elements with logical lines that merely extend the forms into yet a new plane or level. There is an obvious stylistic kinship that Nihart's sculptures owe to Constructivism and Futurism, yet Nihart maintains his distance from them as well as consistently adds his own attitude and expression. The seriousness of Constructivism and Futurism is relaxed by Nihart into an abstraction that is animated, friendly and very approachable.

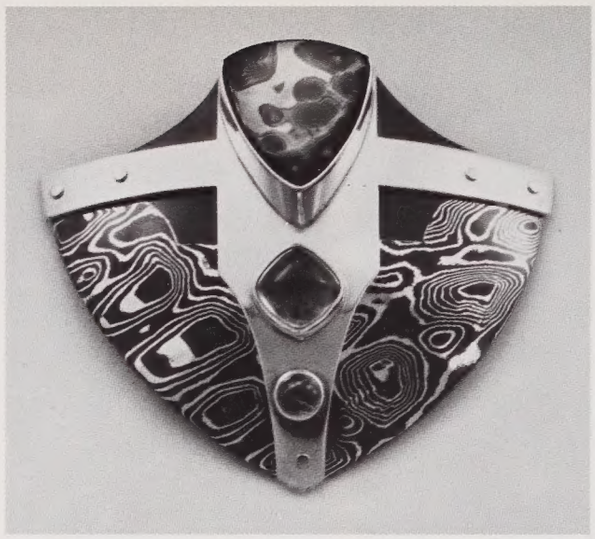
The four white sculptures in a set are perhaps the most successful of the show, as they are read simply as form. Their technique is obscured. For this same reason, they are also isolating from our (human) experience of them. The three rusted, natural-toned works relate to our earthiness, which adds weight and grounding in the viewer-object negotiation.

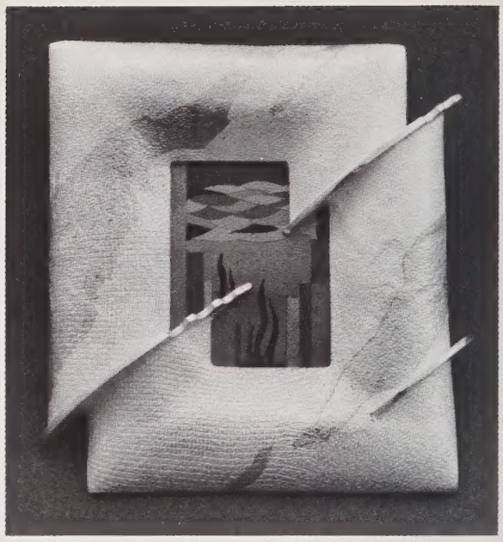
In *Nomandi*, flat circles or circle parts visually spin around a slightly bent central stock, throwing curved ribbons out and upward. The central stock is balanced by two other legs, each demonstrating the tension of holding up energy, one by bowing, the other by its thin leg being interrupted – jagged and broken. Typical of Nihart's works on view, the sculpture continues to change form as observed in rotation around the work; and typically, in so doing, the viewer is engaged as a part of the sculpture, finding and integrating new vistas. Nihart provides a great family of forms to look at. The human scale of the works accentuates this dialog.

Star Dancer, Korusai and *Water Spirit* relate together as instruments, or symbolic methods of capturing and measuring space or essences. *Korusai* looks like a sextant or sun dial (or perhaps a moon dial?) with a heavy, shifting arc opening to the sky. Its deep earth tone seems to absorb the information and transfer the essences of it through its tripod legs, represented by a large lightning gesture, a solid stiff, tapered leg and a mysterious tapered leg with two humps. What the viewer makes of this, or any of the sculptures, is the engaging of their personal imaginings with a traditional thirst for the mysterious and playful.

William Baran-Mickle is a metalsmith and writer living near Rochester, NY.

Rosemary Gould
Shield Series #3 Brooch
mokumé-gane married metal,
sterling silver, psilomelane,
amethyst, 2½ x 2¾ x ½"





Metalwork '91

Washington Guild of Goldsmiths Sixth Juried Exhibition
Target Gallery, Alexandria, Virginia
December 1, 1991 – January 5, 1992

Hyung Kyu Lee
Seascape Brooch
sterling silver, anodized titanium,
24K kum-boo, 1¾ x 1½ x ½"

by Dalene Barry

The Target Gallery in Alexandria, Virginia – a small, elegant, pearl-gray chamber – was the perfect backdrop for the dazzling array of works in "Metalwork '91," the sixth biennial exhibition of the Washington Guild of Goldsmiths.

Most of the 78 works were jewelry. The thriving membership of the Washington Guild, as well as dozens of sibling organizations across the country, manifests an ever-increasing enthusiasm for wearing beautiful, thoughtful and sometimes provoking ornaments. These groups also encourage the creative pursuit of discovery in those who choose to make these objects – no matter whether the individual is a full-time goldsmith or a nonprofessional adventuring spirit looking for personal fulfillment.

Deborah Dubois's *Cornelius VanSchaak Roosevelt* brooch combines gold and rhodolite garnets with black slate and black coral in a 3-inch composition of lines suggestive of an underwater hideaway. The jeweler's love of materials is evident here, with the same master craftsmanship attended to a chunk of stone, a snippet of plant life, semiprecious gems and 14K gold. Rosemary Gould's *Shield Series* brooches are reminiscent of a time when metalsmiths were employed to arm soldiers as much as embellish fine ladies and gentlemen. The powerful beauty of *Shield Series #3*, which won Jurors' Special Recognition, is enhanced by the intricate patterning of mokumé-gane. The prominent cross-bar in sterling silver adds strength by setting the compact boundaries in this representative piece.

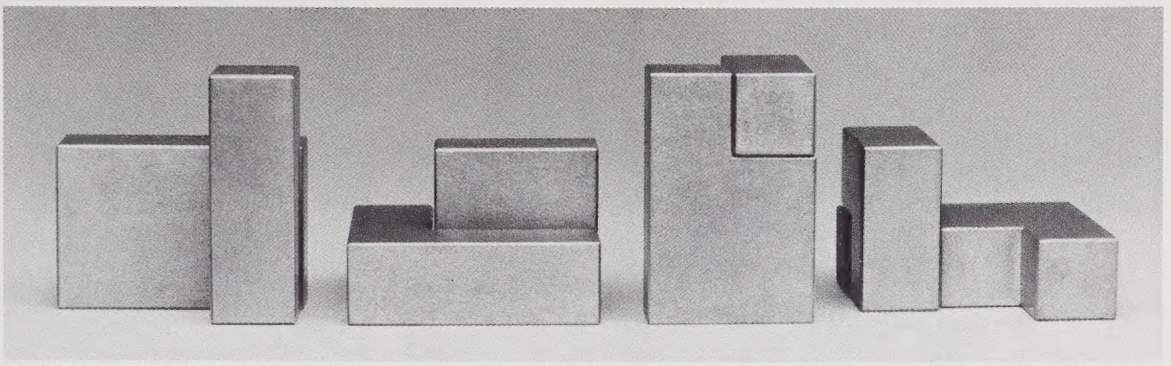
When we place ourselves near the surface of water and see objects both from above and below the water line, our view is split slightly, though nothing is out of focus. The sterling and 24K kum-boo frame for Hyung Kyu Lee's *Seascape* brooch illustrates this vision, shifting the titanium seascape slightly, inviting the viewer to a new perspective. Lee's brooch also received Jurors' Special Recognition. Betty Helen Longhi's brooch, another Jurors' Special Recognition, is a convergence in line and materials. Flares of anodized niobium burst from bands of 18K gold/sterling bi-metal, stopping short of a central crevice to reveal freshwater pearls emerging from golden filaments. *Summerscape '90*, Komelia Okim's shoulder piece, juxtaposes abstract shapes and colors of sterling, 24K kum-boo and anodized niobium in a dazzle of color and golden glow. Okim's unique mastery of the technique she has taught so many others is evident in this Jurors' Special Recognition work.

Gretchen Raber, another Washington master, illustrates her affinity for architectural line in a pair of tourmaline earrings set in 14K gold and in her *Mathematical Notation* brooch of seemingly random elements which are, in fact, a fascinating study in well-conceived counterbalance. Other jewelers and works highlighting the Washington Guild's excellent collection included the distinctive gem-studded multimedia *Strata II* brooch/pendant by Barbro Eriksdotter Gendell; Susan Sanders's dynamic brooch of onyx, 14K gold, watermelon tourmaline and diamond; Karen Werth's mixed-media brooch *A House for Nine Muses*; and Douglas Zaruba's smashing 14K gold and diamond cufflinks and shirt studs set.

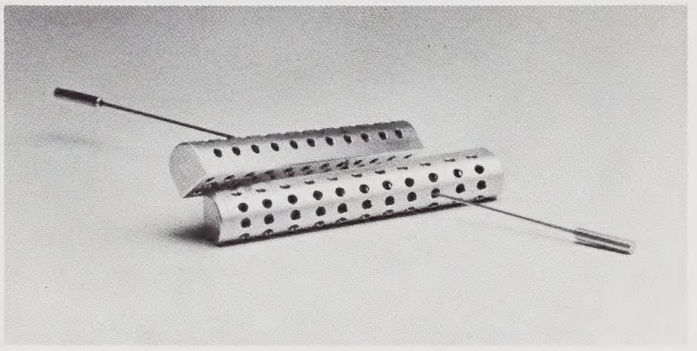
There were disappointingly few exhibits other than jewelry, but these select works were superbly crafted. Allan Abrams's *Tree of Life* menorah of sterling and hand-blown glass spins upward and out from a pedestal; *Jazz*, Cynthia Corio-Poli's enamel-on-copper wall hanging, evokes chords of Gershwin; Larry Lewis's table sculpture *From Our World, Don't Look Too Close* offers a bit of personal whimsy in mixed metals and flowing Plexiglas.

Jurors for "Metalwork '91" were metal artist Ronald Hayes Pearson and gallery owner Sheila Nussbaum.

Dalene Barry is an enamelist and writer living in Washington, DC.



Divided Squares
components for necklaces
I/1 – I/4 zinc, silver, 1990



Brooch, silver, stainless steel, 1991

Elisabeth Holder

Jewelerswerk Galerie
Washington, D.C.
September 12 – October 3, 1991

by Lee Fleming

For more than a decade, Elisabeth Holder's commitment to jewelry as interactive sculpture has differentiated her work from that of the mass of artists who take their inspiration from pure geometry. Holder's rings, brooches and bracelets don't simply invite the wearer to assist in their arrangement; they require us to insert, overlap and personalize what would otherwise be impersonal cubes, circles and arcs.

In her recent show at Washington, D.C.'s Jewelerswerk Galerie, Holder's hallmark rings and bracelets from 1987-88 were joined by necklaces and brooches created during the last 18 months. The juxtaposition underscored Holder's new direction – a change in finish and function subtly achieved, yet still striking.

Her "old" approach is exemplified in a 1987 monel, gold leaf and stainless steel bracelet. A ball-and-socket joint allows an expressively textured solid arc to be swung up outside the containing circle; once the bracelet band has been slid onto the wrist, the arc piece clicks down into place, securing the bracelet. The wearer "collaborates" by fastening the catch, but Holder still controls how the bracelet will look once fastened.

The same process applies to many of her 1989 rings, tiny sculptures of bronze and steel with grooves into which we must insert separate square bands before the piece is complete. Off the body, these objects can be pieced together in varying compositions, like miniature minimalist sculptures. But as with the bracelet, there is one "right" way to fit them together in order to wear them.

In her 1990 cube necklaces, Holder begins to move away from the worked, oxidized and gold-rubbed surfaces of earlier pieces, using subtly brushed silver, zinc and stainless steel. At the same time, she allows an element of randomness to enter into the way a wearer might arrange her jewelry. Her zinc cubes may fit together in positive-negative perfect geometries when off their steel circlets, but on the body, they not only break apart but conceivably can be rearranged by the wearer.

This transition – from limited interaction to enormous freedom to take the artist's work and make it our own – culminates in an impressive 1991 series of brooches and pocket pieces. The brooches, composed of pairs of long, hollow forms of pierced bronze or silver, form rhomboids or rectangles when at rest. The density of the pinpoint piercing varies, so that at times we're aware of the solidity of the shapes, while at other times they seem to dematerialize into a shadowy screen.

This shift in the way Holder works her materials is matched by a new approach to functionality. The wearer can create one-of-a-kind pieces simply by running a long pin through the holes of the two pieces in any combination fancied, and the possibilities are endless.

Holder's most impressive offering, however, is her witty substitute for a pocket handkerchief. These pocket pieces of fine silver glued over wood consist of squares placed in the pocket, with other pieces attached to the edges by hinges. By rotating these appendages, the wearer can create literally "outstanding" wearable sculpture that may protrude into space for several inches or be arranged to hug the body. Thanks to Holder's willingness to challenge the wearer's inventiveness, the choice is ours.

Lee Fleming, a freelance critic, writes for City Paper *in Washington and several national art publications.*

Artistry supplied by William Harper

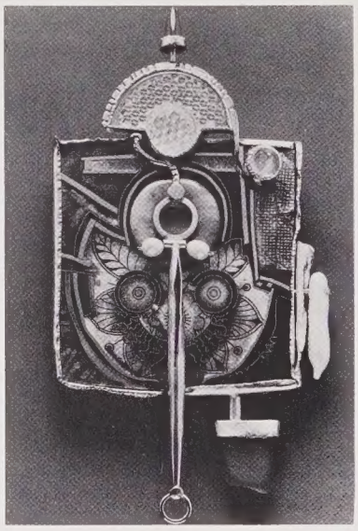


photo: Franklin Parrasch Gallery

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William Harper, *1987*

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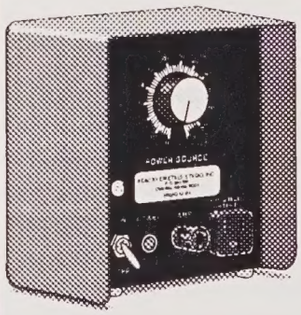

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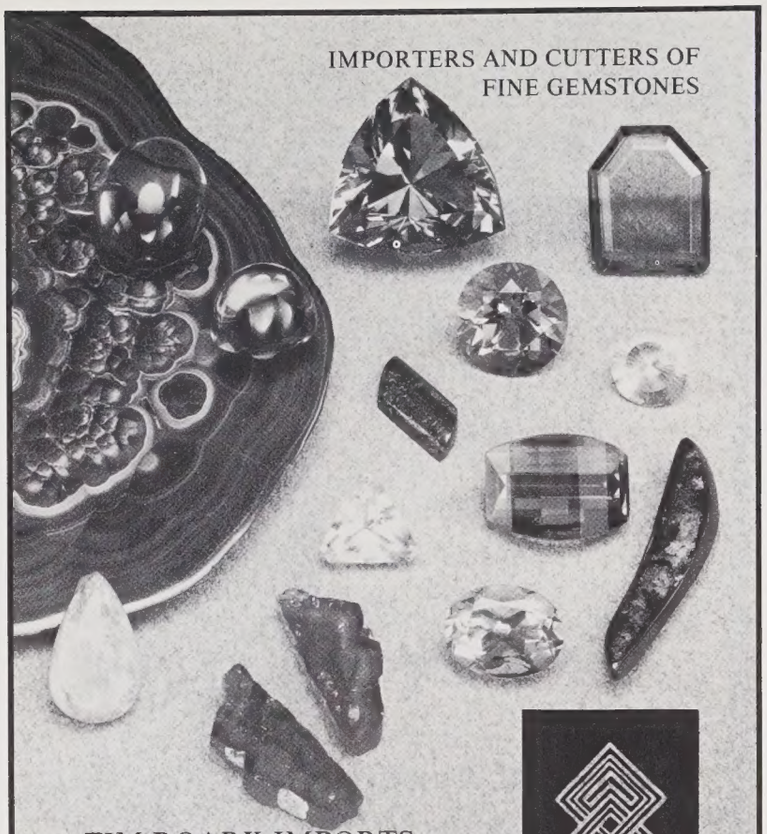

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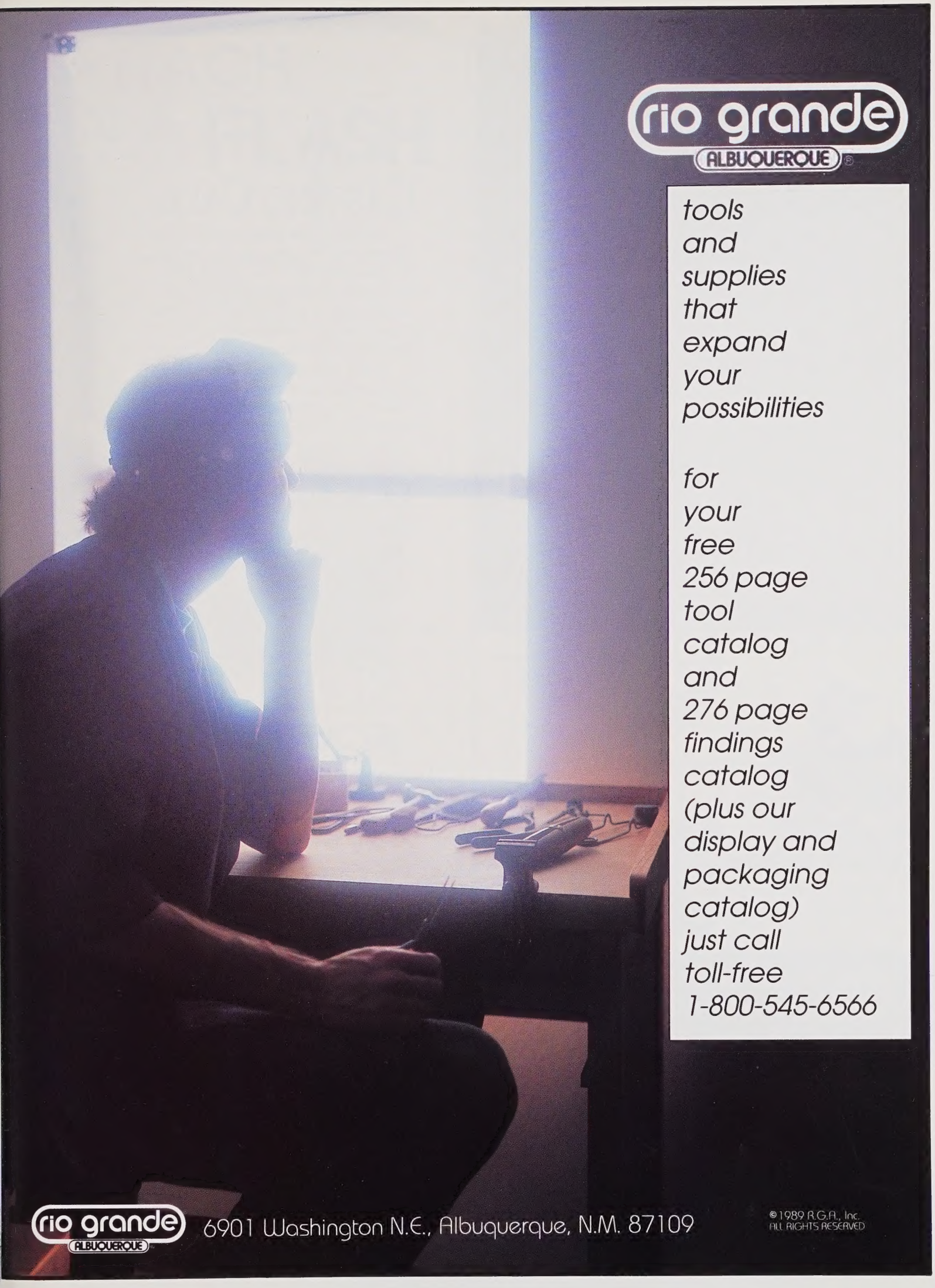
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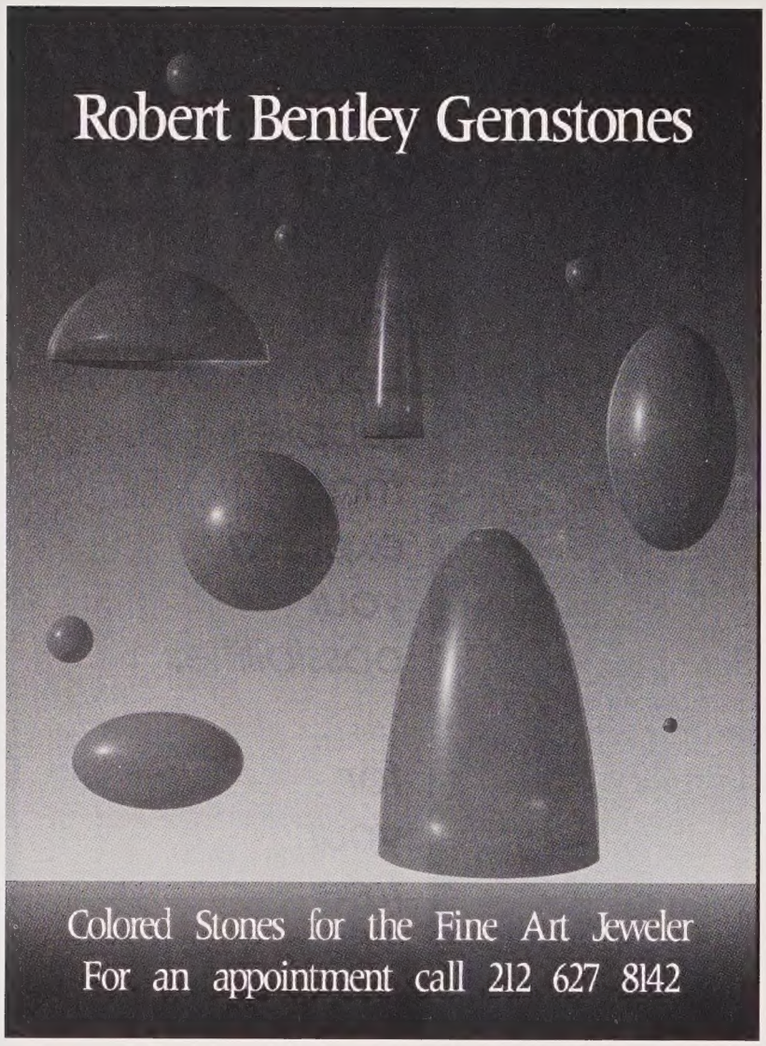

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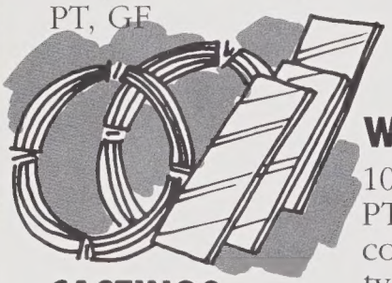

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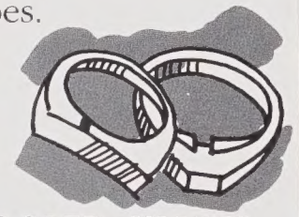

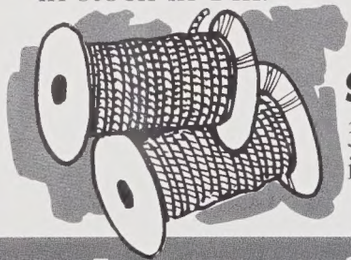

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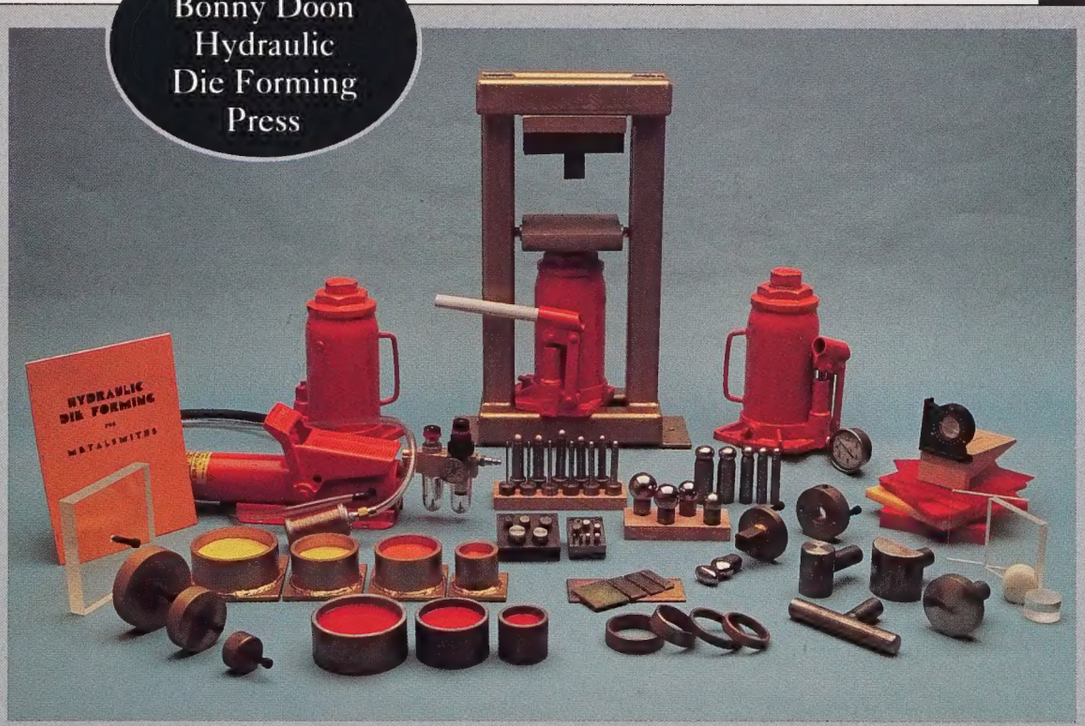

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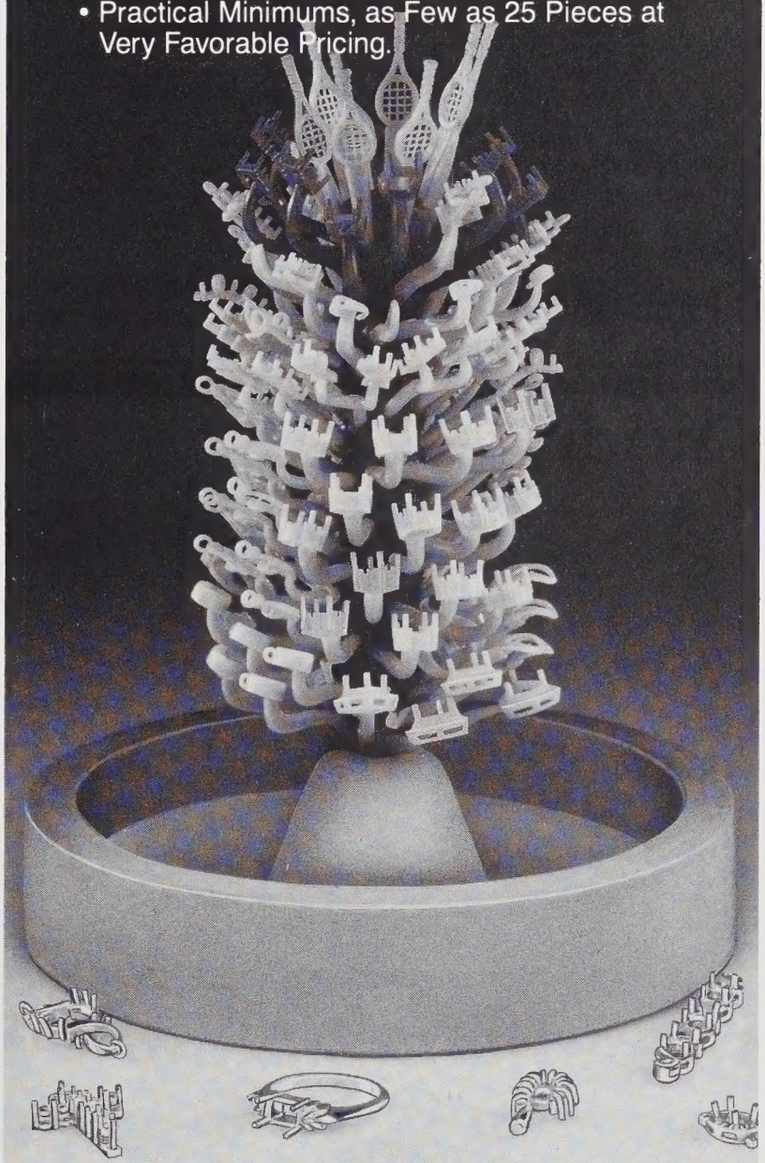

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INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Advanced Casting	56
Allcraft Tool & Supply Co.	62
Anchor Tool & Supply Co.	54
Anne Hawken Gem Lab	53
Appalachian School of Art	42
Arrowmont School of Art	45
Artwear	IFC
Atypic Gallery	5
B.A. Ballou	61
Bonny Doon School	43
Boris Bally & Roy	7
Concepts	1
Cranbrook Academy	41
Creative Metalsmith	5
David Fell Co.	62
De Novo	9
Dunconnor	42
E.B. Fitler Co.	60
East West Dyecom	61
Franklin Mint	11
Frei & Borel	59,IBC
Haystack	42
Helen Drutt	1
Hillock Anodizing, Inc.	63
Idyllwild School	40
J.A. Henkel	56
J. Alger Gems	53
J. Cotter Gallery	2
J.S Ritter Jewelry Supply	52
Jewelry Arts Institute	40
Jett Gallery	2
Larry Paul Casting	54
Met-L-Art	61
Miami Jewelry Institute	42
Michael Good	BC
Minneapolis Tech. College	43
Mobilia Gallery	9
M/R Precious Metals Gallery	5
Myron Toback, Inc.	60
National Cast Products	54
Newall Manufacturing	60
Niche	58
Nova Scotia College/ Art & Design	44
Penland	43
Peters Valley	43
Philip David	9
Precious Metals West	60
Quadrum	1
Quicksilver	62
Reactive Metals	52
Red Sky Plating	63
Revere Academy of Art	40
Rio Grande	55
Robert Bentley Gems	56
Rochester Inst. of Technology	41
Ross Metals	57
Sculpture to Wear	5
Sheltech	56
Sierra Casting	59
Skidmore	41
Southern Illinois Univ./Edwardsville	45
Southwest Crafts Center	45
Studio Jewelers	40
Susan Cummins Gallery	2
The Crafts Report	44
The Cargo Hold, Inc.	53
Tim Roark Imports	53
Toga	52
Touchstone	44
Triad	57
Tripp Lake	45
Van Nostrand Reinhold	45
Winged Camel Metalworks	7
Worcester Crafts	44
Young Manufacturing	59

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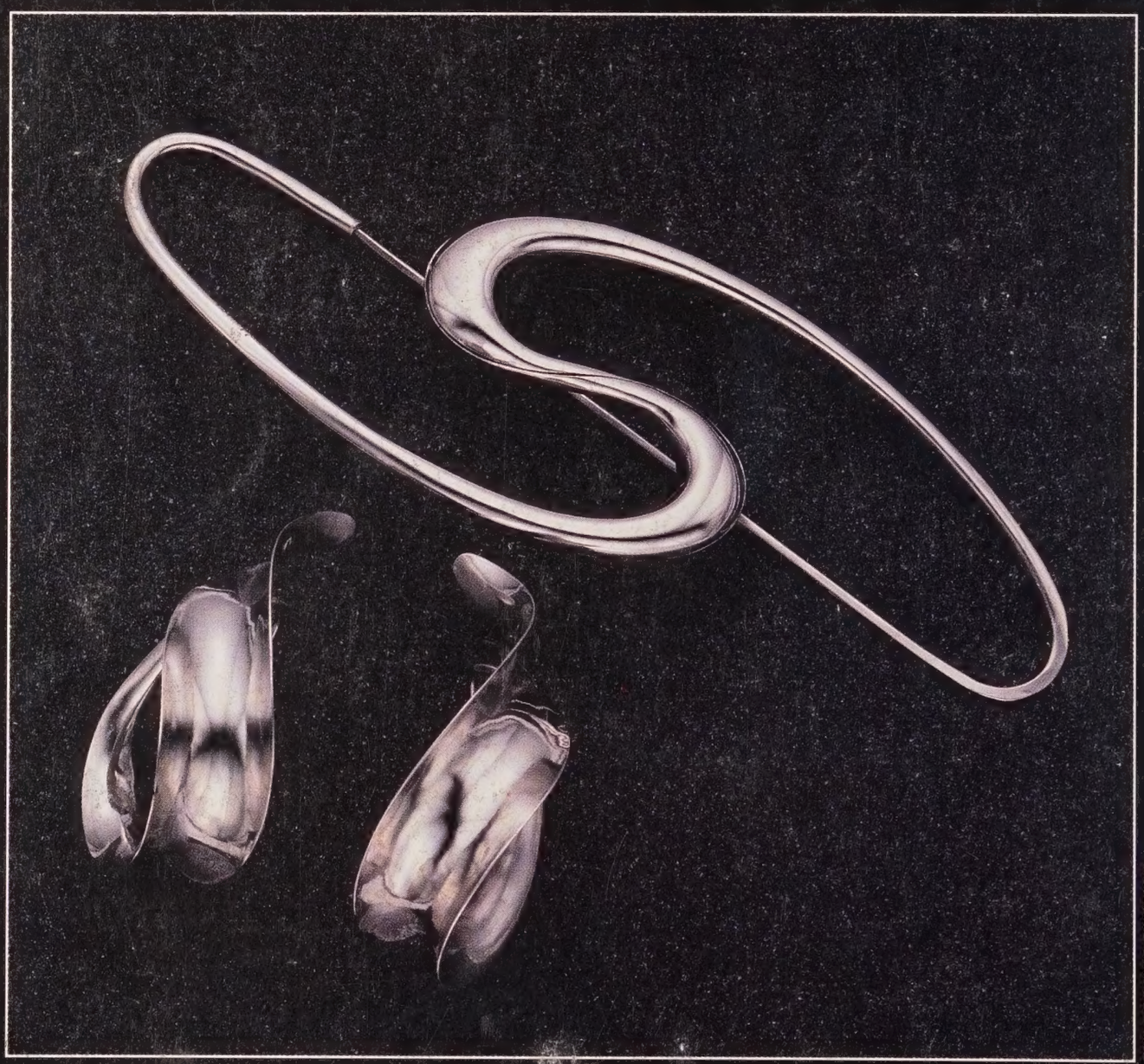

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